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THE STORY OF MARGRÉDEL



BEING A FIRESIDE HISTORY
OF A FIFESHIRE FAMILY



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WILLIAM McMICHAEL WOODWORTH

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THE STORY OF MARGRÉDEL

BEING A FIRESIDE HISTORY OF
A FIFESHIRE FAMILY



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G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

NEW YORK

27 West Twenty-third Street

LONDON

24 Bedford Street, Strand

The Knickerbocker Press

1894

22443.16

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FEB. 19, 1915.

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THE STORY OF MARGRÉDEL

A FIRESIDE HISTORY OF A FIFESHIRE FAMILY.

MY family and the Oliphants were sib. I do not believe, however, that the blood-ties would have been very binding, had not my father sailed one of Wull Oliphant's ships and had the misfortune to be drowned in the business. After that Mr. Oliphant kept stepping in upon us on his way to and from the harbour. I do not think that he missed a week, or fourteen days at the most, except on those occasions when, as all the town knew, he disappeared for a fortnight at a time. This would happen once in a twelvemonth, I believe ; and he never made anyone the wiser as

to where he had been. ' Twice a-year, too, Meg Orrick, the post-runner, delivered a letter from him at our house. Had my mother eagerly looked forward to its coming (which she did not), I daresay I should have known what was in it, for we had no secrets after my father's death. As it was, years passed before I knew that Wull Oliphant paid the rent and other things besides. I can truly say that my mother was happier on seeing him than on seeing his letter, and that says much for both of them, for she was only a poor widow woman, and he was the most well-to-do man along the coast. Besides, he was a big man to come up so many stairs. I think I hear him in the lobby now (for if by chance the door was not back to the wall he would lift the latch himself), drawing long breaths before he could cry—

“ Are ye in, Mrs. Anne? ”

He always added to himself, “ Man, I'm pechin' ; ” yet he seldom sat down in the parlour, but asked, “ Are ye a' weel? I just cried

in to see ; ” and said his short say standing in the lobby with my mother. It did not matter who was with her, or what she was doing, she always ran out to Wull Oliphant when she heard his voice on the top of the stairs. I used to think that she looked very well as she stood beside him, with the little black cap on her head which the neighbours said she was setting at him. They need not have wasted their words. He told her more of his affairs than he told anybody living, and was very kind to her, as he was to everybody who deserved it, and to many who did not. She, in turn, was very grateful to him, without ever forgetting her dead husband. It could never have slipped my memory that it was on the 19th of October that my father was washed overboard, for the house was always very quiet on that day,—my mother, who was the life of it at other times, being silent, and much taken up, as it seemed to me, with looking out to sea.

Once a-year we took dinner with Mr. Oli-

phant. It was always somewhere about Hansel Monday that we went, for I remember that dining at the Oliphants' crowned the joys of singing-cakes and other delights. I daresay, however, that we were asked just when Thrift Hetherwick, the housekeeper, wished us. It was well known that Wull was under Thrift's thumb. I tell you all this because it was when we went home from one of these dinners that I asked my mother about the Oliphants, and that she told me about Wull and his brother Douglas, and the boy and the girl who were buried at Kemback. But she could not tell me anything about Margrédel—or said that she could not—and wondered that I should ask about her. Then I told her what had happened after the ladies had left the table that night.

It chanced that there was a little girl in the company, and she and I, being children, and, as it were, there on sufferance only, were not given a place with the others, but were set down at a little table by the fire, which we

enjoyed greatly. Our glasses were filled with some wine and water, and every now and then, as the habit was, we looked towards our elders and said, "Your health, Bailie Malcolm," or, "Your health, Miss Pratt," and sipped our claret. Then I heard my mother say to Mr. Oliphant—

"'The laddie's fourteen thi' day.'"

Wull said to me—

"'Here's your health, my boy, an' mony happy returns;'" and all the company looked at me and drank my health, and turning to my mother said—

"'He's a well-grown lad. He maun be a great comfort to you.'" And I felt very proud.

Because it was my birthday, I was allowed to sit with the gentlemen after the ladies had gone. So I sat on, never opening my lips, but listening to the gentlemen talking and laughing; and all went well until, because of the claret in my head most likely, I began to yawn.

"Run away to the drawing-room," said

Wull. "You 're wearying to get to that girlie."

Then what does young Landale, the lawyer, but say—

"Some folks have to go farther to see their lady friends."

Now Wull Oliphant was a mild man—none milder ; but he was very quick as well, as big flat-shouldered men often are. So he says very sharp—

"What may you mean, Mr. Landale?"

To this the young man replies very quietly, as if there had been a quarrel between them before,—

"I 've heard o' folks going all the way to France to see them, and never say that they had been, for all that it takes a fortnight to go and come."

I think the gentlemen all opened their eyes on one another at this speech ; but Wull did not reply to it, nor was any more said on the matter. But afterwards, when the company was rising, Wull came round the backs of the

chairs till he stood, near where I was, at Mr. Landale's elbow.

"You 're a puppy, sir, a puppy," he said into his ear, though I could hear him, being young and sharp at sounds. Then he walked back and opened the door for his company.

That was the story that I told my mother ; and although she could not throw light on it—or did not choose to do so—I never forgot it. It led me to make inquiries into the following affairs, concerning the truth of which my cousinliness with Wull Oliphant gave me, at his death, unusual means of learning. Not that I know much more than my fellow-townsmen, among whom the facts have been well sifted, so that few errors have not fallen to the ground. For them this story, one of many such, did not need to be written down ; but there may be some abroad who wish to hear the truth of a history which often whiles away a winter night in our town.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

IN his young days,—that was in the young days of the century,—Douglas Oliphant had the reputation of being the handsomest youth in the streets of Kirkcaldy. “He has a leg,” might have said the clever lady in the novel, and summed up in the saying his graces of person and position; only, did you know the town as I have known it, you would not look in its society to find a Mrs. Mountstuart. It was a royal progress he made eastwards against the sun, from the porch of his father’s house to the harbour where his father’s ships lay. The faces of the damsels looked fascinating behind the small window-panes in the High Street, nor was he slow to give them rec-

ognition, as their eyes grew round at the sight of the graceful figure that swaggered below.

Even so had swaggered, in his heyday, his grandfather before him, on these same streets, beneath these very windows. For the Oliphants had aye been handsome, men and women of them (and that was their curse), from the barber founder of the house, whose face was his fortune, down to this young Douglas; and the list was long of maids who had to rue their knowledge of this burgher family of merchant shipowners.

In Kirkcaldy (whether you take it now or a century ago—time has not changed it much) is but one street, creeping along the foot of the hill which slopes down almost to where the waters of the Firth break, and leaves little flat footing for a town. The houses have crept close together, as if to escape, as far as possible, the east wind, which for many months of the year blows on them from the North Sea. At times it sweeps through the mouth of the Firth, a perfect hurricane: up the narrow

wynds, and cutting the corner gables with its bitter tooth, clears the street of passengers and bangs the close-doors rudely. In earlier days it even brought with it the sea, forcing it up every wynd and lane till it met on the street and splashed with spray the wheels of the mail-coach on its way to the National. There were sensible reasons for imagining that these visitations were specially designed by Providence for cleansing. At any rate, the back-going tide left the town and its inhabitants looking all the fresher for their battle with the wind and the spray.

All good people who reach a mature age—that is, who have ceased to feed on hope in this world, and live in the lessons of their past—have one spot or scene or figure, often it is only the memory of one, round which their affections gather. So it is with good old towns. Sometimes it is a cathedral, sometimes a market-cross, or a well, or a bridge, or even a tap-room. It matters not what it is, or how it has become the rallying-point of the town's

forces. It is identified with the town itself. Here is to be found the concentrated essence of its life. Here all its interests are focussed, even as all the events of the good man's life, all the tides of his feelings, ebb and flow around his hallowed spot. The very exile pictures it when his heart goes back to his native town. Synecdoche is the heart's figure of speech.

The centre of Kirkcaldy's life in the days of Douglas Oliphant was the harbour. A fleet of vessels lay outside in the bay. Ships were ever crossing the bar, making their way among the timber-lighters, from which the yo ho ! yo ho ! of the bargemen resounded all day long among the pierhead houses. Merchants, sailors, custom-house officers thronged the quay. A strip of uncausewayed footpath, opposite the custom-house, through whose open windows telescopes stood ready pointed, was known as the Sailors' Walk, and here ship-captains paced out hours together, talking yarns and looking seawards through the masts when their eyes were not cocked on the weather,

after the fashion of old salts. From Adam Bendalow's tavern on the west side of the old East Port there was not a house that did not contain Dutch cabinets, Chinese ornaments, trophies from every land, and all that marks the seafaring life.

At every second door almost of this bit of street was a tavern. The well-sanded floors were two or three steps below the level of the causeway. Their windows being small, they were dark by day, and they reeked of sperm-oil all night. Beyond the front room, in which the drink was sold, there was a second with a window in the back wall, on the sea, which led naturally to the one topic of conversation that held with the customers. The atmosphere, moral as well as physical, of the East End, smelled of whisky and tar.

There was a West End, of course. In a sense this had to be, for this single old-fashioned street, with its crow-stepped gables and outside stairs, lay east and west, so far as a direction could be given to anything so tortuous and winding.

Thus it happens that to this day men speak of going east and west, not up and down, the street ; and citizens who, in the less virtuous age of toddy suppers, took a wrong direction in issuing from up-stairs doors and fell over the low parapet to the causeway, have been known to exercise their philosophy by declaring, as they picked themselves up, that they were "goin' wast hooever." In a social sense, also, there was a West End, rearing itself on the decline of shipping trade, and sheltering a new community of shopkeepers, manufacturers, and bankers. But for long after our story even the National Hotel, standing in its midst with a welcome door, held second place only in its heart. Irresistibly it was drawn eastwards by the harbour ; and there were days, such as that on which the whaling fleet sailed away, when the new town was silent as Herculaneum.

Just at the junction of the east and west stood the Flemish-looking house of the Oliphants. A pillared porch led off the street into a flag-paved lobby which ran, with the

help of a few steps, to a similar porch on the garden side. For the garden lay up the rising ground to the back, a strangely fresh, quiet spot, to be so near the bustle of the grey street. From this lowest floor a fine oak staircase mounted up three storeys to the dome at the top. On each storey was a landing which gave entrance to the different rooms.

It was a century old, this house, and tenanted by none but Oliphants, for it was built by the barber afore-mentioned, with the money brought him by his wife, Janet Hope, the dowered daughter of a long line of landed lawyers. It was a strange old story, how, high-born as she was, the handsome youth aroused her passion, and he married her, old and ill-favoured and all, with the curse of the young girl, young mother, whom he had deceived, ringing in his ears. Children came of the marriage,—handsome sons, beautiful daughters; but the daughters died, and the curse descended, and the old house was the home, through generations, of ill-living men who

mourned wives and mothers and sisters, while the iron of the curse ate into their souls.

There came a morning when Douglas Oliphant made his last journey from the old house to the harbour for many days to come. Few were to be seen at mid-day on the quay who could afford their "meridian." Douglas and that young spark, Captain Banbury of the Ayrshire Fencibles, who spent his short forenoons with him on the pier, followed, only too readily, the customs of the day. Lucky Mitchelston's tavern was crowded when they reached it. The Royal mail-coach stood empty at the door, blocking the narrow way; within, postboys and passengers shouted for drinks, and the two bloods stood back in the booth and discussed wine and women. What exactly they talked of so loudly I never knew,—of some midnight debauch undoubtedly.

"And what about the old cock?" said Banbury.

"My father? What of him?" Douglas replied. "He'll be playing 'penny brag' in

here or at Bendalow's till he sits in the saw-dust. If he get home to bed, the hin'most trump would n't wake him !”

“ You see what you are coming to,” the other said. “ The old cock crows.”

“ And the young ane learns. Oh ! we're game stock.”

There was commotion in the room beyond, the door of which stood always wide. A tall, straight old man, the picture of Douglas, as I recollect him, rushed out. Banbury's pull at his friend's sleeve and his whispered warning were too late. Old Oliphant had been within earshot, and now he seized the jehu's whip.

“ I'll learn you to crow, my cockerel ! There, and there, and there,” he said, raining down blows on his son's shoulders.

A ship sailed that night for the Baltic. In the afternoon Douglas stepped on board and bade the captain count him a passenger. The master knew the reason. It had flown over the town in a twinkling that old Oliphant had beat young Douglas out of Lucky Mitchel-

ston's. He knew well that counsel was of no avail ; but at least, he said, he might make arrangements—wine, clean linen—for the passenger's comfort. Douglas had no objections. The messenger despatched for these carried a letter from the captain to Douglas's father, asking for instructions. The tide was flowing, and the ship must be cleared of the harbour in an hour. The old man was dining, and Marjory took him the master's letter. He tore it in pieces, and flung them in her face.

"It'll tame the whalp," he cried, and went on drinking.

When the mate returned he had to make his way through a crowd which his news, breathlessly imparted on his road westwards, had brought to the pier. He delivered his message verbatim, and Douglas, standing within ear-shot, but keeping a cheek, with a great wale on it, towards the sea, laughed back to the captain.

"The whalp's going to his couch," he cried, as he went below ; and soon the *Arctic* was tacking down by the Bass.

Of the events of the next years—the capture of the ship, Douglas's exile in the enemy's prisons, and all his adventures on French soil—my story cannot tell here, although of the sad fruits of some of them it will have to make a record. But at last, one early dawn, he crossed the Firth at Pettycur, and the coach delivered him at the National. He walked the short distance to his father's house, and mounted the stair.

His father was coming down, and they met. The old man started and flushed. Then he held out his hand.

“Dug! How are ye? It's an ill aff-come ye've had,” he said.

“By Gad! sir, and this reception's the ill-est part of it,” was the reply.

“Laddie, laddie,” the old man said, laying his hand on his son's shoulder. “Dinna ye think I'm glad to ha'e ye back?” Then he went on: “Wull's at his breakfast. See if Marjory has none for you.”

His father turned down-stairs as Douglas

sprang up to the first landing, and opened the dining-room door. When he entered a fair-haired boy ran to meet him. He had heard the step and risen, as he thought he recognised it, his love and hope racing in his veins so that he trembled, and his usually pale face was crimson. He threw himself into his brother's arms.

"O Dug! Dug! and you're back again. Where have you been a' this time?"

"First let's have breakfast, Wull," Douglas said. "I've been half the night on the Firth since I tasted. Ye'll hear the rest by-and-by."

He sat down to breakfast and ate heartily, while his brother waited on him, and ever and again looked excitedly from the bull's-eye windows and told who passed on the street beneath.

"Now, lad," said Douglas, when he had finished, "let's to the harbour."

"And see father," said Willy.

"I've seen him already," said Douglas, gloomily. "I met him on the stair."

"And what said he, Dug? He's been dying with the thought o' your being drowned. Did ye notice him older?"

"It was a cool greeting he gave me, anyway."

"O Dug!" was all Willy's reply.

Willy took his brother's arm as they went out, looking proudly up at the bronzed face.

"Man, Wull," Douglas said, halting a minute and gazing round, "this place smells of home."

When they reached the bottom of the stair, in the dark recess where it turned on the lobby, their way was blocked.

"Father! father!"

Willy's cry sounded up the staircase to the very dome where the morning rays struggled with the cobwebs. Old Oliphant had turned to descend when Douglas and he parted, but the shock had been too much for him. He had fallen to the foot, and lay there a lifeless heap while his boys breakfasted above.

Already Willy was on his knees beside his father, and his brother bent over him.

“Stay. We’ll carry him to his room,” commanded Douglas.

Willy sprang to his feet, his golden hair hanging over his neck, and his eyes flashing.

“You’ve killed him, Dug! you’ve killed him!”

“Hush, lad,” said the other, attempting to lift the heavy load in his arms. But Willy took the head when they carried the dead man up-stairs.

So Douglas came home to be master. For although by the old man’s will the house went to the younger son, the heir, if he turned up, was to have the use of it, as well as his share in the business.

“I swear, Willy, I said nothing to him. I came up the stair, and he met me and put out his hand. Otherwise it was as if I had left yesterday. ‘How are ye, Dug?’ he said. ‘It’s an ill aff-come ye’ve had.’ And I said his cool reception was the worst of it. ‘By Gad! sir, this reception’s the worst of it.’ These were my words, Willy. And he said, ‘I’m glad to see you, Dug, laddie; Marjory

'll give you your breakfast ;' and I came up to you."

And Willy believed him. Still, the next months were full of disillusionment. Deep down in his affectionate breast he had treasured the memory of the big brother of his boyhood. He had looked for his home-coming, and hope deferred only made his heart glow with a stronger affection, that burst into a perfect passion of love during that short time between Douglas's entrance to the dining-room and the finding of his father's dead body.

But the heart creates its own object of love, and the real brother looked poor beside Willy's creation. He believed him. He loved him still. Yet all was changed. His honest eyes read the selfishness of his brother's nature, day by day, and Douglas went about ill at ease under the wistful looks which Willy bent on him. Others shrank from him with an uneasy feeling ; and Douglas noticed this, and that Willy was the favourite, and that on the

quay it was his word that was law. His heart was embittered at these things. He was filled, too, with a repining restlessness. A look of gloom settled down upon his face, yet it seemed only to lend a new grace to it. His dark eye burned all the brighter upon his swarthy, weather-stained cheek. Men turned to look upon him in the street, and the women in the dark window-recesses watched his coming and going, and owned him handsomer than ever.

Then there came a day when he stood looking, from his windows on the lower floor, upon the street below, as Jean Maitland drove past with her ponies. There was laughter on her face like the play of a sunbeam. Farther west, in wide moleskins surmounted by a red waistcoat that matched his honest merry face, stood the Cupar carrier, Rab Hetherwick, to-wit, whose beams were reflected in Jean's face.

"All Eden Braes is here together, Rab," she had said, pulling up by the carrier's cart — "even the cuddies."

"May I no' drive a pair as weel's yersel', m' leddy?" had followed Rab's salute.

"But it's kirk and market with you, Rab. Do you go anywhere without them?"

: "Lor' forbid the kirk, mem!" said Rab, in pretended consternation. "They nicht mak' them elders."

And as Jean shook a finger at him, with an "I'll tell Marget," and whipped up her ponies, the broad grin spread over his face and reflected itself on her clear-cut delicate features, which were turned up now, half-expectantly, to Willy's room. Her eyes took in Douglas in their sweep. She looked again, and Douglas met the look, and her cheek burned as she drove on.

But the eyes are the keys of human hearts, and by the year's end Douglas and she were married.

CHAPTER II.

BY the banks of the Eden, where it flows eastwards from Cupar town through green meadows and under wide-boled willows, stood the house of Jean Maitland and the new home of Douglas Oliphant. Not a year before her appearance below his windows had gone like an arrow-shot to Douglas's heart, Jean had been left this house of Eden Braes by the death of the uncle who had brought her up. She was a bright, vivacious girl. Her wealth of spirits sustained her in the somewhat lonely and sparing life she led with her uncle. His death gave her more freedom and a fortune as well as the little estate. The lands on it were farmed by a grieve. She had few friends. Her household cares were light. So

she had her heart's content of walking and riding, and her ponies carried her everywhere in the country-side—and one afternoon, as we have seen, to her fate at the feet of the man with the handsome but somewhat sinister face.

That she should have found it where she did surprised many who, poor students of woman's nature, had not learned how useless it is to study it. But it was no surprise to Willy. As far back as he could well remember, the handsome looks of his brother had been remarked. Thus the saying of many an old skipper in those years when Douglas was given up as lost, "He was a braw lad, your brother was," had been backed up too authoritatively by the traditions of the household to trouble him, even had he been given to jealousy. Now that Douglas was back, he had evidence before his eyes, although, it is true, he had in plenty, also, evidence of his brother's unhandsome doings. But love laughs at evidence. Each revelation of the dark side of Douglas's nature pained him, but he remained

loyal to his old ideal. And while others wondered, he thought it only natural that Jean should make a hero of him too.

As for that other matter of which the gossips said so much at the time, that Willy himself had fallen in love with Jean, the truth about it takes longer to tell.

His father and her uncle were friends, and after her adoption visits between the two households became frequent. By this time Douglas had sailed away, and she knew nothing of him except through the stories which reached her country home, and the prattle of his brother Willy, who talked of Douglas, as of all things, with an enthusiasm which made good grounds with her brightness for a common friendship. He was then a mere boy in years; and although she was his elder by a few months only, these counted for more in a girl, and he was put under her charge. He looked up to her with all the pure affection of the early teens for the vision of beauty which first casts its spell upon

them. There was one incident which illustrated their relationship—very trivial in itself; but had it not clung to Willy's memory long after more serious affairs had vanished from it, I should never have known of it. On one of the early occasions on which she visited the Oliphants in Kirkcaldy, the two old gentlemen being engaged over their bottle, at which time their conversation was not very elegant, they sent her off to romp with Willy. She found him at the top of the house busy at his school lessons, and, elder-sisterly-wise, as I have explained, she would assist him. Would she hear him his history, then? The period he was reading was that of Monmouth's early successes in the western counties, when men flocked to his banner and the maidens made processions to his camp, to be rewarded by his fine speeches. The elements of romance were in the story of the young conqueror of hearts and kingdoms, and they turned this boy's head as he sat in that dim garret at the feet of the dearest lady the poets

ever sang of, and suffered her rebukes. For when she asked him how the village girls were received by the Duke, he had half-anticipated the question, and "With a kiss!" he answered vehemently, so that she knew what he meant.

"I don't like boys who talk so," she said without a blush, and went on with the story. And with Monmouth's failure Willy's heart sank too, and lay as prostrate for Jean's forgiveness as the Duke did for his sovereign's mercy. The fairness of women and the despair of the manly heart are earlier than passion. It did not occur to Willy until long afterwards that Jean was not angry, but only thought she ought to be.

When the susceptible years were reached, this relationship was well established. But in these years it is the something new which attracts. If boy and girl outlive them without the bewitching novelty appearing, then nothing is more natural than that the early affection should ripen into love. But, as often as not, this novelty does appear. It did to Jean, we

know. Whether it did to Willy remains to be told. In the meantime, more unusual influences were moulding his life.

When Douglas did not return, Willy went into his father's business. Too early the elder son had made his own friends and gone his own way, leaving the old man to go his. Now it was different. Partly under Willy's influence, partly under that wonderful one of old age, which is so natural that its absence seems monstrous, and yet so beautiful that it is a token of hope for the race, old Oliphant grew more mellow, and Marjory, looking from the kitchen windows upon the garden in the summer evenings, marvelled to see father and son walk under the trees in such affectionate converse. It was at these times, or over the fire on winter nights, that Willy heard the stories of his family. The relation of memories of the dead is often our first step in convalescence. By it we test our recovery ; often it helps towards it. But it sometimes happens that the memory of the dead lies locked up in the heart long after the time when he could

not have brought it forth without a tremor. And then there comes a day when a young hand is given the key, and is allowed to draw it out and spread it before the old dry eyes; and the old dry heart feels the better for the airs of a new time sweeping through it, as the old town was the fresher for the winds and the waters rushing through its musty streets. So it was with this old man. He was never happier nor better in his life than he was in these last days when he had Willy as a companion. I have heard it said that some of his boyhood's joys came back to him—his love of the woods, his care of the birds' nests in the garden, his interest in "the carricks," which led him often on Willy's arm to the sand to see the "doe" hailed, and many another not so lovable. It is a kind law that makes an object grow beautiful by the attrition of things not all lovely in themselves. The withered sapless undergrowth looks warm and bright if the winter sun only shine upon it.

At this time Willy got the first inkling of a curse that lay like a blight on the family's for-

tunes. The story was so well known about the harbour that he easily learned more of it, and a sad story it was for his young heart.

One evening the two were walking on their favourite strip below the trees. The sun was low down in the west behind the Norman tower of the church which stood above them on the slope, so near at hand that it might be said that they walked in its shadow. Willy led his father's thoughts easily into the old channels.

"My grandmother died when she was quite young. My mother, Wull,—that's her portrait in the up-stairs front room—I was n't a year old when she died."

"And my mother?" said Willy, stopping in his walk.

"Died at your birth, Wull, and 's lying up there wi' yoor sisters. All dead. There 's never been a woman o' us lived, Wull, and Dug 's gone, and only you and me remain."

They walked a little farther ; then Willy stopped again.

“ Father ? ”

“ Wull.”

“ Is there no end to it ? ”

“ Pray God, yes, Wull—if Dug ’s deid.”

Strange as it may seem, in Dug’s death lay the old man’s hope. For a time his heart had yearned for Wull, as he thought of the blight that was in store for his life. And then like a good spirit had come the thought that the line of the curse was through the eldest son, and that his eldest son was dead. He was sure (and he ransacked the family papers till he confirmed it) that there had been no break in the succession of eldest sons.

But when he met Douglas on the stairs that morning he came back, hope, the feeble hope, died with the sight of him. A mighty sense of justice, even to this ill-fated first-born, strung him up to the calmness of his greeting, which drew forth his son’s anger. When Douglas turned up-stairs the reaction was too great, and he died with his dying hope.

Something of all this Willy guessed, bit by

bit, as in the months succeeding his father's death, full with the pity of it, he pondered on that history. As for Douglas, he was as indifferent to his own danger as he was to his brother's concern, and returned to his old courses, eating his life out the while, with a regret that ought to have been remorse for the adventures that were past. He sowed his wild oats in view of the town, and the name of Dug Oliphant became a by-word even as far away as Cupar, where the troop of yeomanry he rode a horse in lay for a week each year.

It was while riding with it to one of these annual trainings that he looked a second time into the eyes which not many days earlier had smitten him. They were riding at ease by Struthers Wood, under the shade of the dykes of Lady Mary's deer-park, with the mad young Earl, their colonel, at their head.

"A song!" the Earl cried, turning in his saddle,— "a song! Come out, Bob Dowie, and give us a stave. You're no great sodger, but you sing like a lintie,"

So adjured, Bob Dowie, the barber of Kirkcaldy High Street, tall and lean, like the Reeve of the Canterbury Pilgrimage, rode out astride as mangy a piebald as ever disgraced a parade-ground, and cleared a lusty throat for "Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch." The strength of forty pairs of lungs was put into the chorus, and twice as many hoofs rang time upon the high-road. The deer within the walls scampered off in a fright, and Jean Maitland in the hollow of the road's elbow bit her upper lip and tightened her ponies' reins, as they reared and plunged till the Earl and Douglas had a head each.

"I thank you, my lord," she said to the colonel; and as she spoke the blood rushed into her lip, so that had Frank Hill seen it (who figures later in our history) he would have said—

"Compared with that was next her chin,
Some bee had stung it newly."

She turned to smile upon her other gallant.

Once more their eyes met, and once more she drove off with hot cheeks.

"A dark beauty," said the Earl. "Smiles like the sun in a storm."

The troop had passed, and Barber Dowie's voice could be heard through the lazy air in the tune of "Moscow Burning."

"Who is she, my lord?" Douglas asked, riding forward with his companion.

"Old Jock Maitland's niece, in Eden Braes."

"And so that's Jean," thought Douglas.

"A hard old sinner," the other continued—"for which he's roasting just now, more nor likely. And she reaps the reward. The sins of the father upon the children—eh? We could all do with fathers whose sin was guineas. She looks devilish fit, though. Did you notice her set her back when that off pony plunged?"

"And her tooth on her lip, and her eyes," said Douglas, eagerly.

"Hard hit, is it, Oliphant? Faith, and it was a sweet stab she ga'e you, and you drew

blood to her cheek in return. But you've done the same by bonnier women in your travels. There be French lasses."

"Shall we ride forward, my lord?" Dug said, giving his horse his heel. The Earl looked at the angry youth, and smiled as he galloped after him to the troop, where Moscow was still burning.

And when by-and-by Douglas told his brother that he and Jean were engaged, Willy was silent. What could he say? The tradition of his family represented a real danger to him—so real that in these recent months he had renounced all thought of wedding Jean, or any other woman, lest he, too, should prove an Orestes before the Furies. It was a boyish resolve, too easily made to be a self-sacrifice. None the less, it appeared to him a self-sacrifice, and one that Douglas also should make. And so no vulgar jealousy, but his own pure love magnified into a great devotion, and the danger he foresaw for the object of it, and pity and sorrow for his brother, tied his tongue, and

the marriage was not touched on by the two. Douglas was too proud to speak of it again if Willy would not ; but he hated him for his silence.

And then, by a chance word, the common gossip came to his ears of Willy's love for Jean. He remembered how, on the day he first saw her, her eyes had gone frankly to Willy's windows, and jealousy ran riot in him. He gave the rein to all his old grudges, and from this time until the marriage Willy had to suffer his anger silently. And after the event Douglas withdrew to his wife's house, and took his money out of the business, in the cruel hope of crippling his brother's fortune. Thus for many years the two households were estranged.

This quarrel with his brother was to Jean the first revelation of her husband's nature. Douglas did not tell her the real reason for it. Willy dared not, even had opportunity been given him. Naturally, she believed her husband to be in the right. But his vindictive

hate, that led him to do material hurt to Willy, her old friend, for whom she had still a warm corner in her heart—that was a revelation. What is the woman to do who, on the eve of her marriage, finds out the evil in her husband? Acquiesce in it? God have mercy on the woman's soul who does that. Fight it? Jean did neither. She ignored it, and acted and spoke as if it were not.

CHAPTER III.

YOU might have searched in vain through all Fife for a couple to match the laird and lady of Eden Braes during the three years after their marriage.

When they rode into Cupar town the shopkeepers darkened their doorways, their wives the windows above. There was great straining of necks as they went down the aisle of Kemback kirk, and when the service was over the congregation lingered in the kirkyard, to see them pass through the gate and down the hill-path to Eden Braes.

Douglas was used to this kind of flattery—it had been his birthright. But Jean said, hanging low upon his arm, a *petite* figure, turning up such a white throat, such a sweet round cheek, to her lord—

"They did n't pay me these compliments before you came, Dug."

This, or something like it, she said often. At times, if they were among the woods round Eden Braes, he stopped in his gait to answer her with a kiss. At others, being wearied with his church-going, and longing for his dinner or the morrow's hunt, his answer was—

"Let the poor devils stare. I dinna mind them."

"You, sir," she rallied him then. "You, sir. Ye might walk through *my* people"—she loved, with her audacious spirit, to twit him thus with living in her home instead of remaining among his ships, with Willy,—“ye might walk through *my* people, from Ceres Market to St. James's Fair, and none hat ye save as my squire."

Which was true enough, for he was no favourite in the country-side.

"And why?" she went on, when his face grew black at this. "Because they 're jealous o' you and your handsome face. For it is

handsome, and ye know it, Dug, though ye make it ugly with these frowns, and I 'm jealous o' you myself when I see the lasses glintin' at ye i' the kirk.

"I 'm such a jealous wee wife, I can't bear them to look i' your way," she would go on, with mischief in her eyes, and probing his sore. "I 'm not like you, who say ye dinna mind the men staring at me."

Then he fumed and fretted inwardly, for he did care, and he knew that she laughed at him.

Whichsoever may have been the right way to keep her husband's heart to herself, this was not it. What he needed was a love that would have grovelled at his feet till he despised it; but Jean's burned in a heart whose bulwarks a good man might have spent noble years in storming, and only reached heaven with the last of them overcome.

The best society in the country-side found its way to Douglas's table, drawn thither by Jean's wit. There was scarcely a family in Stratheden without a son walking the Parha-

ment House, and often, as they coached it home from Pettycur, at the end of sessions, these young lawyers arranged to meet at Eden Braes for a bout of repartee with the bonny Mistress Oliphant. The name they gave her for beauty and for wit made her quite a reputation; and others sought her out to whom her beauty was apparent enough, if her wit they were content to accept on hearsay. Her brilliant following flattered her not a little, and turned her head just so far that she forgot her husband's temper. Douglas at his end of the table sat biting his lips at jests whose relish (their flavour, indeed, was often flat enough) his palate was dull to, and uneasily watched the young wigs troop to the drawing-room in Jean's train, leaving him with his friends to drink too deeply of wine soured with jealousy. From his boyhood he had loved a soldier, and it usually happened that officers lying at Cupar mixed at his table with Jean's admirers and the squires and lairds who attended there to his liking. These last found Douglas's wine

and conversation agreeable. Even the best of them knew that amidst the finesse and artificiality in the drawing-room they would be like fish that were waterless, and were content to remain in the company of the bottle and the not too refined story, where it was possible for them to shine.

“Now the ladies are gone,” Douglas had a habit of saying when Jean led off her suite; and the remark kept waverers from following. Then the host entertained them with a fund of adventurous anecdote, which he retailed best when the wine passed freely. The result was that when Douglas rose, his head and the heads of his guests were not of the clearest, and they were less able than ever to match the young lawyers, who could wag bitter tongues, especially as Jean seemed to enjoy the sharpest sallies. Angry words and unseemly conversations followed more than once, which Douglas blamed her friends for, while she, with a great deal of spirit, retorted on his. And this quarrel about their friends they had often.

What happened was what always follows—the breaking down of self-respect and reserve. The better people drew off, or paid their visits at times when Jean could receive them herself. Douglas's friends remained to sneer at the people they had used to meet there, whose presence had put a restraint upon them and upon Douglas which was removed now. Every day, for his part, Douglas was getting more wearied with his quiet country life, longing restlessly for his old adventurous existence, and paying frequent visits to Cupar, which did not tend to make him more sober. His pride winced under the drawing off of the better society ; but it could not keep his feet out of the old fast road he had begun to step once more.

The first child of the marriage was a girl, and when the question arose as to what she should be called—

“Your mother's name was Margaret : call her Margaret,” Jean said to her husband.

Unlike Willy, Douglas remained unaffected

by the traditions of the family, which he had heard more than once, and each time, in dare-devil fashion, laughed to scorn. He had defied the curse; he had done so to Willy. And yet, when his wife said, "Call her Margaret—it is a family name," an inexpressible fear held him.

"Call her Jean," he said, "after yourself." And Jean Oliphant she was called.

Two years later a boy was born. Since their marriage they had not seen Willy. He had sent a christening mug to little Jean, and that was the only time they had heard from him. Still, although the farce was becoming very pitiable, Mrs. Jean continued to ignore her husband's anger, and in a gay manner, with an affected unconsciousness, talked of Willy as her friend.

At the boy's birth the question of names came up again. It was the first day that Jean had been able to rise from her bed, and she stood by her husband's side at the window, watching the river flowing under the trees.

The monotonous quiet of the landscape soothed her delicate nerves. To Douglas it seemed to echo the dull level of his present life.

"Douglas, do you know what Thrift Hetherwick was telling me?" she said, in the coaxing manner that worries irritable men.

"I don't gossip with the maids," he answered roughly.

She did not study her husband's mood. Still, it is a wife's business.

"Will it please you to gossip with me, then? They say Wull Oliphant is going to marry some pretty London girl who is staying in the town at present."

Douglas drummed on the window-panes. I do not know if Jean had come to suspect the cause of the brothers' quarrel; but, at any rate, she said—

"Could n't we call the boy after him? Call him Willy, Dug."

The man could not curb his angry jealous temper, and he lifted his hand as if to strike her. In her weak state she half-fainted and

fell. The servants were called. Her maid, Thrift Hetherwick, came first, and found Douglas on his knees beside her in a passion of fear and tenderness.

“I got up too soon. I fainted and fell,” she told them all, when they carried her to her bed, a cripple for life.

But even there her spirit refused to yield.

“Call the boy Willy, Dug,” she said to her husband again and again.

And Willy he was called.

CHAPTER IV.

BRIGHT as Jean had been in the short, happy, if somewhat giddy days when the drawing-room at Eden Braes had been a *salon* where she entertained wise and witty men, her spirit did not shine out as it shone when she saw her house more and more the resort of drunken wags, and her husband losing caste. She received these cronies of his with charming grace, as if they had been the retinue of a prince instead of drunken civic dignitaries from Cupar, or disreputable farmers and bonnet lairds. Nor did she shrink from receiving them after her accident, but was wheeled to the table and conversed gaily, steeling herself against their coarse jests and tales, nerving herself against her abhorrence and pain, in a mad hope of redeeming her table from the

shame of it, and of her husband, who got drunk before his guests, so skilfully did she engage them. And then, when she had at last to go, she was wheeled back to her room, broken down, aged with each night's engagement, her hair greying as she listened to the carousal across the hall.

Meanwhile her children were growing up together. One of little Willy's earliest recollections was of being ushered into boyhood and a boy's suit. Previously to this the cribs of the two had stood side by side in the night nursery. Now Willy was to have a room of his own, and these two symbols of departed childhood almost turned his head.

It seemed strange to have to kiss each other good night on the head of the staircase, instead of calling it out sleepily from underneath the blankets in the nursery. So they made it up to keep their doors open, which would make the distance between them less, they thought.

Little Jean was just falling off to sleep when a noise across the lobby aroused her. Rising

softly, she crept to her brother's room and peeped in. Evidently the putting on of a new suit could not be delayed until the morning, for there he stood arrayed in his velvet trousers, and fighting with the buttons of his blouse.

"How nasty of 'oo, Jean," he pouted as his sister interrupted him. "I was coming to give 'oo a surprise."

But Jean fastened his blouse, crying "Shoo ! shoo !" making believe all the time, as she had seen her mother do, that she was driving the black dog from his shoulders.

Willy paraded up and down in his own room, and then the pair stole across the lobby to the nursery in order that he might see himself in the long mirror there.

It chanced that Douglas Oliphant had left the company he was entertaining, and he heard the little laugh of his daughter Jean as her brother made some grotesque attempt to magnify the attractiveness of his new dress.

At the sound of his footsteps on the stair

the two little heads peeped out to see who was coming. They were fond and not at all afraid of their father, and laughed as his tall frame filled the nursery doorway.

His seven years at Eden Braes had made a change upon him. His handsome figure, trained by hard fortune, was bent a little now under a load of flesh, and his carriage was no longer easy. The beauty of his features, which for a time a fast life had helped to intensify, was now paying the penalty of debauch. There was still the dark glance on his face, and the wily wine sparkled in his eye.

And yet the painter could not have wished a lovelier picture than that to be seen in the nursery this night. The dark scowl on Douglas's face changed to a pleased smile as Jean in her night-dress, her white feet curled against the cold floor, and her hair lying along her shoulders, turned her brother round and round to show off the beauties of his velvet blouse.

What a blessing is man's inconsistency, as we call it! Would his friends below have

credited Douglas Oliphant with filling up the blanks in the carouse with caresses from his children? Who knows? Who knows how many of them, too, were treading the downward steps with their eyes on the stars?

"Off to bed, little one. Why, you're quite cold," Douglas said to Jean, and gave her a kiss.

"You'll come with me," he said to Willy. Taking the laughing boy in his arms, he carried him down-stairs, and, entering the dining-room, set him on the table in the midst of his guests.

"My son and heir, gentlemen," he cried laughingly.

Willy's sister heard the clink of the glasses and the sound of voices as she lay and listened. What strange thoughts come into little heads on sleepless pillow! We grow away from integrity with our clothes. The child thinks and feels and acts, all in one; when he grows older, all the parts of him fall to pieces and go their own way; and only the grace of God, we

are told, can make them one, as He made them in the beginning.

That laughter and clink of glasses which she heard nightly down there meant an unknown world to the girl. And now Willy had joined it. That was what she felt, dimly, just as she felt that Willy looked up to her to be influenced. She was only a child, excited and weary. Perhaps being left alone with the gathering shadows of the nursery for the first time strung her imagination unduly. So she did not fall asleep, but lay and listened and wondered.

By-and-by Willy came up-stairs, and felt his way to her bedside.

“ Jean, are 'oo sleeping ? ”

“ No, Willy.”

There was a long pause, during which he had crept closer to her.

“ Jean, what makes mamma cry so ? ”

“ Mamma cry ? ”

“ Daddy took me into her room to show my new dress, Jean, and ”—his voice grew awed here—“ she had to lay down her work for cry-

ing. Did you ever hear of another Willy, Jean?"

"Another Willy?" said Jean, meditatively.

"No,—just you, Willy."

There was another long pause, and Willy said again—

"Yes; but there must have been another, Jean, and mamma said he was like me, and kissed me and began to cry and dad sent me to bed."

A muffled shout of laughter sounded up the staircase and reached the ears of the two children, who were awed at their mother's tears. Willy pressed closer to Jean, and she put her little arms round him, and, crying at the incongruity of that laughter and that sorrow, the two fell asleep together.

When Willy, arrayed for the first time in his new suit, his yellow hair hanging around his boyish face, entered his mother's room on Douglas's hand, the image of his uncle Wull flashed across her mind. And with that image came the recollection of her fresh young days,

when she had known him, though not so young, still the picture of her own boy here ; and with that recollection looking into the face of her unhappy lot, chained to her chair, and her sad, sad life, what wonder the tears flooded her eyes, and she had to lay down the work which she could no longer see for them ?

But Douglas, with too much wine in his head, was furious at this reception.

“ He’s the very picture o’ Wull, Dug ;” and when Willy in elation began to speak of what the gentlemen in the dining-room said to him, she took him from his father’s hand, and clung to him and kissed him. And Douglas, rudely taking him from her, carried him to the door and sent him up-stairs.

“ O Dug ! Dug !” Jean cried ; and when he came back at her call, she had her face in her hands. She had never broken down so before him.

“ Spare the laddie,” she cried ; “ he’s too young for such company.”

“ He’s only a bairn,” he said. “ My com-

pany 's good enough for him," he added, with an oath. "Where have you any better?" and he would have flouted at those who were used to come but did not now.

But she caught him by the sleeve, the poor crippled woman trying with all the power of pleading in her eyes, in her voice, to make up for the winning ways and caresses with which she had conquered him when in the old days she hung low upon his arm.

Even then a gust of laughter, the same laughter that was sending two little hearts upstairs asleep with the mystery of sorrow, sounded across the lobby.

"D' ye hear it, Dug?" she cried, holding him tight, with an agony in her voice. "D' ye hear that, Dug? It's death to the boy to be there. It's been death to our happiness, Dug. I maun listen to it, though it's a knife in my heart, as I sit here night after night, and my bonnie love in there among 't, and me all my lane.

"I maun listen to it and their jests and foul

tongues," she went on, "and you sitting by, Dug. They've no respect for a woman, none for your wife. No respect for her grey hairs." She laughed hysterically, and held up a lock. "They're grey, Dug: look! I would bear all that, and more, if you'd spare the laddie. Spare me the thought of him in there."

When Douglas returned to his company it was wild, hilarious, full of wine. One madder than the others, seeing his sobered face within the door, in the midst of his own tipsy revel, staggered to his feet.

"Hullo, Oliphant! Back from the bosom of your family, eh?"

And then, recalling a toast he may have heard at that same table, in better days, on lips better than his own, he hiccupped out—

"Here's to the bonny mistress of Eden Braes!" and drank his drunken bumper.

Douglas with a stride faced him, and dashing the glass from his lips, laid him low beside it.

And this got noised abroad, painting Doug-

las's reputation blacker than ever ; for it is the penalty of sin that its very remedies must sometimes violate the law and the Gospel. But on this account his table became less the resort of braggarts, and of men content to buy their wine with their subservient wit.

Jean would scarcely allow the children out of her sight when she was well enough to have them beside her. But often, after any excitement, after her pleading with Douglas, for example, she was ill and prostrate, and sat in her chair with care and anxiety for her boy and girl eating the strength out of her.

And so Jean and Willy grew up together in Eden Braes.

CHAPTER V.

IT is time now to tell of their uncle's doings during those years of enstrangement.

It would have been a miracle had he come quite unspoiled out of his sorrowful youth. Perhaps you think that Wull Oliphant (for so I had better call him, as every one did, lest he be mixed up with his nephew Willy) embraced his experience of it too fondly. Well, we may safely allow the early years their enthusiasm and sensitiveness, when Time is so ready to take the edge off them. Had Wull been thrown back upon himself by the calamities of his boyhood, he might rapidly have become selfish and hard-hearted, as those are apt to be whose hopes are very bright before the cold douche is brought to play upon them. What saved him from his danger was a healthy

trading instinct. Through it he had become, to an extent unusual in one so young, a man of affairs in his native town, and an adviser of many men in their ventures. He sat among the bigwigs at the upper end of the Council Board, where the lamp burned. For in these days the humbler representatives of the citizens were huddled together at the bottom, where they were expected, like the little boys, to be seen and not heard. They were not even very well seen, for when one of them made a remark, those at the top would peer down into the darkness, and say, "Wha's that speakin' doon there?" As for criticising, they never dreamed of it. The name of Sanders Thomson was a memory in the town simply because he had ventured to do so, and had been told from the chair, "If it were na for the place you're in, my man, I wud jail ye."

Nor, in spite of his enterprises being crippled when Douglas withdrew with his portion, did Wull fail to build up his own fortunes. The doors of all Kirkcaldy houses which he chose

to enter were open for him from his birth. But, he not being jovially inclined, his other amiable qualities could not have opened the hearts of his fellow-merchants had there not been joined to them an aptitude for striking a bargain. Wonderful good fortune attended the sailing of his ships, and (in the language of the place) he was a "well-to-do man."

Besides, no one unless he were a hermit could have failed to be touched with something of the colour of the manner of living then in vogue. Uncouth in its manners, vernacular, and boisterous in its ways, it was a kindly generation Wull was born into.¹ In these days, when the villa was not dreamed of, men knew

¹ Two little facts suggest more of its genius than volumes could do. One is that Bailie Malcolm, with the consent of the Crocodile Club, translated *dramatis personæ* as "a dram for each person." The other is that Trickle Morton, who cried a worthy baker's pies of a Saturday night, did so thus: "Pies hot! pies hot! *Penny anes and twopenny wans.*" The elegance of *wans* (*Anglicè*, ones), as compared to *anes*, was to the mind of the town only a due recognition of the might of wealth.

their position, and could live and joke and cultivate a familiar wit in the knowledge. Honest burghers, half-witted naturals, even some who claimed a touch of gentleness, dwelt on the same stair-head, and rubbed shoulders on the causeway in a friendly way without averted eyes. The ladies were homely, but as proud as they were homely, and beauty in ruffles and three inches of heels was something of a divinity, as was right when every youth was something of a beau.

Wull Oliphant did not take full advantage of the wide gamut of pleasure this afforded. He was one of the few in his generation in whom was to be found the serious mind which in the next was to work many righteous cures, but at a great expense of lightness of heart.

"He's a very solemncholy youth, Will'um Oliphant," Bailie Malcolm said often to his brethren of the Crocodile Club. Still, he invited the solemncholy youth to his house, and made him very welcome, as did all who had

daughters, it being an unnatural thing that he should live always alone in that big solitary house. His pleasures, taken thus mildly, and his being much made of, did not dispel the loneliness of his home, nor make him forget all the causes of it. But with his business, and the friendliness of his fellow-men, and the unspoken sympathy of old Marjory's attentions, they helped to do so. And when to them was added romance, his troubles were almost forgotten.

When Beatrix Morley came north from London to visit Bailie Malcolm and his family, she found Wull, who happened to be journeying home from Edinburgh, a very practical help in the trials of her passage at Pettycur Ferry. Wearied and sick as she was, she drew funny mental pictures of herself and her rustic cavalier (for so she thought of him) ; and in course of time the friends she had left received a very lively account of her journey, and of a certain "tall, fair, handsome young man of these parts," who bespoke special comforts to her.

"Do not picture my champion dressed in a kilt," she wrote, "but in wonderfully well-fitting breeches, which show him a tolerable figure when he stands straight upon his legs, for in bowing he has much to learn. He is a man of no little importance in this district as well as in his own eyes (which are clear blue, by the way,) as I might have guessed from the respect paid his rather authoritative manner. But I was too sick to notice anything. I only learned it when our coach stopped before a plain-looking inn near the centre of this town, where cousin Malcolm and Mary and Kate awaited me. My knight of the Ferry was introduced to me as a Mr. William Oliphant; but the girls call him 'Wull,' and cousin Malcolm says they are 'weel acquaint'; so I may expect to see more of him. What a sight we must have presented on board that boat! Fancy the big retriever of the barrack-yard—do you remember it? a consequential animal—fancy it, returning from dining and fussing about your kitten—only, I did n't feel kittenish. But I'm sure I feel grateful."

She told him so very prettily at parting, giving him a white ungloved hand.

"Safe at last! I shall ever be grateful to you," she said.

"I am aye at your service, madam, and glad to find we have friends in common," was his reply; and it was then that she noticed his bow, which he made in his best manner, with fifty pairs of eyes at High Street windows looking down with pride.

The Bailie patted Wull on the shoulder, getting almost on his tip-toes to do so, and said loftily—

"Will'um will join us in a hand at whist on an early nicht."

"Just as one of ourselves," he added, as he gave his arm to the smiling but still pale Beatrix, and left Wull to walk home on air.

In that letter she wrote home Beatrix scarcely did justice to her satirical powers. But she showed her observance in that touch about his "rather authoritative manner." It was the manner of one accustomed to play

"first fiddle," as we say, and scarcely became so young a man. But it was exaggerated by a new excitement. The touch of austerity in him could not prevent a century's legacy of gallantry now and then cropping to the surface. He had never brought the roses to the cheeks of his captains' daughters, as Douglas did, and would have done to Beatrix's, if anybody could have made them show through the powder there. Douglas always had the rakish air. But the fires leapt up unaccountably in Wull when the pale, beautiful face, with its expressive eyes, looked up to him in thanks for the offer of an exchange of seats in that uncomfortable pitching pinnace.

So it came about that this chance meeting brought to Beatrix Morley's feet, when she first flashed upon Kirkcaldy society, the most eligible of the young sparks who were expected to toast her in their cups. It was a very provincial society, and a small star made a wonderful lustre in it. Mary and Kate Malcolm, for example, the Bailie's daughters, who

were as far removed from beauty as from plainness, did a good deal of twinkling ; but, indeed, Beatrix would have outshone bright stars anywhere, and knew it, and condescended much, in consequence, upon her cousin the Bailie and his associates.

She honoured Wull with a delightful *tête-à-tête* when he accepted the Malcolms' invitation two evenings later. Kate and her father were playing their after-dinner game of draughts when he went in, and Beatrix allowed him a seat close by where she sat, looking more charming than ever in the Bailie's big chair by the fire. The occasion of their first meeting stood them in good stead when other subjects failed them, and she was ever ready with a fresh comical description of her evil plight. When two young people are pleased to recur to one topic of conversation, it is a sign they are on good terms with each other. These two even pledged themselves friends in an indirect way.

" Oh, dear me," Beatrix said, at the end of

a hearty laugh at some recollection—trivial enough, unless told in such circumstances.

"It's dreadful to think of the trouble I gave you."

"Ye ga'e me none," he said. "Ten times as much would have been a pleasure."

She laughed in her corner.

"Ten times naught are naught," she said, in schoolboy tones. "I always heard that you Scotch were exact and logical and cool-headed. But your argument rushes on like Paul's epistles."

I rather think that Beatrix illustrating from Paul's epistles must have been delightful.

"Sunday's sermon," thought Kate.

"Tell Beatrix what Rab Hetherwick, the Cupar carrier, said," the Bailie interposed. (They all knew that he meant to tell her himself.) "Rab was arguing a point with his minister, and the minister thought to grip him by saying, 'But Paul says so-and-so.' 'Ah! but,' says Rab, 'that's where Paul and me differs.'"

"Mind your game," Kate said to her father, who was laughing as if his comments were the most relevant in the world. "We all ken your stories."

Beatrix said quietly to William—

"His—eh—anecdote is fresh proof of what I said."

"I can come back to what I meant to begin with, though," Wull replied, also in lowered tones. "It was no trouble if it gave me your friendship."

The *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum* she had twitted this young man upon was coming out in new instances, and she opened her eyes a little at it. But she answered him—

"You may be certain of *that*. We speak like old friends already."

"They twa's very cosh," said the Bailie, looking up from his board. And Kate thought so also. Beatrix gave Wull a smile, and made him happy with a look which said, "Once more, what he says confirms what I was telling you."

The weeks that followed were lover's weeks for Wull. The youngsters in the coffee-room made eyes to one another at his restless coming and going. The old men looked over their newspapers and smiled to themselves, like sly old dogs licking their toothless chumps over a puppy's inevitable distemper. The doings of Mister Will'um and the English ledly were chronicled in every close from the harbour to the West Port. As we know, they even reached his kinsfolks' ears at Eden Braes by way of Rab Hetherwick and his daughter Thrift. At certain tea-drinkings among the fashion, at which the Malcolms and their cousin were not present, or when they had left, much was said by the matrons about what was due to one's own sea-maws. And one lively girl once whispered to her neighbour that, to her mind, more was due to the daughters than to the maws, and the remark was passed round among the young ladies for the reason I mention it, as a specimen of wit, and caused considerable laughter till the graver and more

satisfying opinion took its place, that "it would be a disappointment to Kate Malcolm, at any rate."

A pretty woman lays her account with the depreciation of her own sex ; but it was hard that Beatrix should have suffered at the hands of the Crocodile Club. Its members—honest men who, week in week out, drank themselves nightly at Adam Bendalow's out of one another's recognition, and rang the bell for one another's removal—felt it a grievance that on her account the Bailie deserted them on one or two nights. They had found out somehow that her father, the Major Morley whose prowess was always on the truant's lips, was, after all, only a captain in a line regiment lying at Hythe, and they swore, over their tumblers, that they cared neither for her nor for any major, nor colonel even, that ever stepped, but could drink with the best of them. They were not professing beyond their reputation, for to "work the crocodile" was

a potent phrase in the town.¹ "We've a' got women folks of our ain," they said to one another, showing that they regarded their neighbour's backslidings as a source of danger to themselves. It was perhaps to fortify them against it at this time that a wag of their number drew the famous caricature of the Bailie being led out of temptation, in which was shown forth in Trickle Morton, the town's officer, the virtuous conviviality of these jolly dogs, while a more fashionable than modest representation of Beatrix Morley stood for the wiles of the hearth which beset them.

Wull Oliphant's thoughts were far above such tittle-tattle of back shops and front drawing-rooms, and he had eyes for none but

¹ The toddy-ladle which gave name to this club has survived all its patrons, and even its usefulness. It is of oak, with a handle carved in the figure of a crocodile. Although the brewer of the toddy might fall beneath the board in the course of his labours, it was not necessary for the club to disperse, so long as another was found able—no one's willingness being doubted—to "work the crocodile."

Beatrix. If he was away from the Bailie's for an evening (and that did not happen often), he could not rest in his own house, but wandered into the garden, and leaning on the west wall, gazed at the chimney-pots and sighed for his divinity, who somewhere under them was dreaming of him, he loved to think. To his credit be it said, I never heard that he lapsed into poetry in these nocturnal reveries. Could he have seen a little farther under the roofs, and Beatrix's smiles, he would have learned that, as she sat toasting her shapely feet, she thought of him, with a kind of negative pleasure, as the only redeeming feature in this world of *ennui* into which she had landed.

His *amour propre*, which everything and everybody conspired to flatter, would have been sorely wounded had he come to know this, and that she was becoming infinitely bored with her one beau's earnest manner. She had never got rid of the retriever idea, and she was sick of his seriousness, and the

gossip and the vulgarity of her acquaintances. She saw well enough that these matrons, with their hints and nods, expected her to become one of themselves, with this very sober-sided ship-owner for a husband. She being given rather to "high-sniffingness," the idea was not very flattering to this daughter of the Hythe captain; and she relieved her mind in some satirical letters, with here and there allusions to Wull, meant especially for the eyes of a certain City magnate, of not more than middle age, said to be anxious to negotiate a bond of matrimony with the daughter of a captain of the line.

Yet her cousins thought to please her by throwing her and Wull together. They accepted an invitation, for example, to go east and see over his ships, and dine afterwards at his house, where their father would join them.

Beatrix was in a most irritable frame of mind when they were putting on their bonnets to go to the harbour.

"This perfect paragon—this Apollo!" she

cried. "You make far too much of him. Is it his good looks or his sweet disposition turns all your heads? I've heard that his brother is a handsomer man."

"Handsome is as handsome does," said Kate. "Dug Oliphant was n't a good man."

"No? He's married, you see," Beatrix replied mockingly. "Oh! Mr. Wull's good" (there was something about this title of "Mr. Wull" that satisfied her ideas of his awkwardness and self-importance), "dreadfully good and *gauche*—gawky, you say: don't you? But young men, you know, when they're bad are very, very bad, and when they're good, just horrid."

"And that leaves us little choice," Mary said, with the calm smile of one who knew a young man of the town who was just a nice medium, and was to make her an excellent husband, by the way.

"Now, Kate," Beatrix went on, still before the mirror, "is n't William just the least little bit of a prig?"

"No—you don't think so. What is a prig?"

"Sweet innocent! Why, Kate, a prig's a person better than yourself—that is, not really better, but who thinks he is, or—or makes you think you are worse. I declare it's as difficult to define as to tie these lappets."

"Perhaps, then," said Mary, "we are all prigs—to one another."

"There! that will do nicely. Thank you, Kate," Beatrix said, with her chin in the air, and patting the bow Kate had tied beneath it. "Thank you, Kate. You're not one. Even if you could be," she added laughingly; "prigs are all men, my dear."

"But all men are not prigs?"

"Bother it!" Beatrix said under her breath. She had said plainly enough what she thought of Wull, and why could they not be content with that?

"No, Kate. I should say not," she said, affecting a wiseacre air. "The man one is going to marry, for example, is not one."

And, to please you, I will admit that our friend is only almost one."

"To please me!" said Kate, reddening.
"Almost?"

"Almost."

"But I thought—we all thought——"

"I know what you all thought," she said, drawing the girl to her; "and you are all little gooseys."

"But you can see . . . Wull thinks."

"I give you up," said Beatrix. "Fighting on the men's side against the sex! It's treason. Wull is only one side of the question. The lady has her right."

"To laugh at a man behind his back and make love to his face," said Kate, with flashing eyes.

"Now you are a goose, cousin mine. Who would think of laughing to Wull's solemn frills? One might as well kiss her hand to the Pope. And to make love behind his back—where would the fun be, dear?"

"You're a naughty girl, Beatrix," Kate said.

"I can't help being agreeable," Beatrix replied lightly.

"You can be agreeable, like——"

"You,"—Beatrix finished the sentence for her.

"No! I didn't mean me. I meant us," Kate cried, leaving the room in a heat.

"Really," Beatrix said to Mary, "your sister has a most exaggerated opinion of that young man."

The young man had certainly a most exaggerated opinion of Beatrix, and it was to receive something of a shock that day. Mary and Kate led the way up the pier, Wull as usual having taken his place at Beatrix's side. There was a change in her manner which he could not understand. "'The 'us' can make themselves agreeable,'" she was saying to herself, trying to feel ill-used.

The knots of sailors fell back respectfully as they passed; but a poor woman in rags, and an old Tuscan straw bedecked with ribbons, held her ground.

"Look at the bonny couple!" she cried, pointing a half-witted finger at them, and laughing back to the sailors.

Wull put a copper into her hand, and Beatrix in her ill-temper asked him the price of the compliment.

"I'm not at liberty to pay for the couple yet," he said, mistaking her mood, in his determination that she should not misunderstand him.

Beatrix quickened her pace in chagrin.

"No," she said in answer; "we'll take it you paid for your own share of it."

Wull made but a dull host that evening. The idea of entertaining Beatrix in his own house had added a kind of comfortable assurance to the hopes which her previous kindness had inspired. On that account her coldness in the afternoon had depressed him the more, and it took the Bailie all his time, born entertainer as he was, to keep the conversation from flagging.

In the course of it some allusion was made to the poor woman at the harbour.

"Oh, that was the woman that hailed——"
Kate stopped short, remembering what she had hailed them with. It flashed through Beatrix's mind that Kate's ears had been very open to what was going on.

"Was it Caledony—full sail?" the Bailie asked.

"Cale—what?" said Beatrix.

"Caledony. The nateral's sweetheart was a sailor," the Bailie went on to explain.

Mary interrupted him.

"It's rather a sad story, Beatrix," she said.
"Her sweetheart sailed in the ship *Caledonia*, and was lost. She went out of her mind with grief, and now she wanders round the harbour singing about the return of her lover and his ship."

"And she's called Caledony—full sail," the Bailie said over his toddy, though Mary had told her story very pathetically. "But that's not the best of it."

"Never mind, father," again interrupted Mary, knowing that the best of it was not likely to be very reputable.

Kate's eyes met Beatrix's.

"And all the gentlemen give her coppers," she said, savagely. "It's time we were getting on our things."

Wull had been silent during this conversation. When the ladies left the room, the Bailie, whose tongue was now loosened by toddy to express what his eyes had noticed, clapped his hands on Wull's shoulder.

"Quite right, Wull, my man. That's the way to bring the jade to her senses. Mind what Rab Fergusson says—

" 'When your jo puts on her gloom,
Do ye sae too, and never fash your thumb,' "

he said, with an oracular wink.

The words may have comforted the love-sick youth when his guests took their departure.

Andrew Anderson, with his flambeau, was lighting the street lamps when the Bailie, with Beatrix on his arm, the two girls following, emerged from the porch.

"Gin ye meet a bonnie lassie,
Gi'e her a kiss and let her gae."

A tipsy sailor was filling the air with his song. Then, with the conservatism of the East End, he ceased his drunken ditty, and followed in the wake of the official, deriding his new-fangled employment, and shouting "Leary-licht-the-lamps!" after him.

The night air had not had time yet to take effect upon the seasoned Crocodile, and he steadied himself with wonderful dignity on Beatrix's arm.

"Go 'way home, 'Thomas Rodger," he said to the reveller. Beatrix could have cried with vexation had the pompous magistrate been less comical.

"He's as drunk 's mysel'," muttered Mr. Rodger, with a passing reflection, perhaps, on man's inhumanity to man, and then betook himself eastwards, waking the echoes afresh with

"Gin ye meet a bonnie lassie."

A few steps brought the Bailie to his house,

and as he stood fumbling for his latch-key the figure of a gaunt grey woman flitted past.

"What's Preaching Mary doin' out the nicht?" he said.

The woman heard him, and turned back.

"This is a bad business, Bailie," she said, twisting her grey locks under her snood.

"What's this now, Mary?"

"James's wife. She's deid."

"Dead! Ay! Dear me. When was this? What did she die o'?"

"No' an hour syne. Drank herself to death!"

"Deplorable!" said the Bailie, shaking his head.

"She's in hell now," the woman went on.

"Tut, tut, my woman. Neither you nor me kens——"

"But it's in the Bible. I believe the Word."

"Hush! Mary, Mary."

"She's in hell. And serve her richt, too;" and the woman went on her way.

Beatrix shuddered.

"Deshent woman, Mary, for an Anibaptisht," muttered the Bailie, busy with his latch-key again. "Ver' strange noshions! The puir body no' an hour dead, and she wud ha'e 'er in hell already."

"Quick, father, and let us in," said the impatient Kate. "It's cold standing here."

"Patiensch, dear. Patiensch. Stead-y! I 'm waitin' till key-hole comsh round."

And this, thought Beatrix, was what the matrons had in store for her, and less than ever she envied the ladies of the town their lives and their lords.

CHAPTER VI.

THERE used to be a little boy of my acquaintance in this same town of Kirkcaldy who, in his bed in the dark attics near the stars, never was afraid or lonely so long as the noises of the street echoed among the rafters. He felt that no harm could come to him when so many men were happy or busy together beneath his windows. And folks older than *he* have made the same mistake.

Beatrice did, for example, when she failed to see—possibly she was constituted so that she could not see—beneath the surface of men and manners, to recognise the common hopes and passions in human beings which prevent them being mere liveried servants, this one of rank, that one of poverty, another of intellect. Her disgust at

"The steir, strabush, and strife"

of this little burgh town was unrelieved by any thought of the eternal joys and woes beneath. Quick to see the rather countrified manners of Wull Oliphant, she never gauged his worth, though it was more sterling than she was likely again to have the refusal of. But that was her business—and Wull's.

He was possessed by a strong and honest and very determined passion, and its crisis approached with Beatrix's departure. Once or twice since her display of coldness he had contemplated declaring himself in writing. He had elaborate periods at his tongue's tip—refined in those chimney-gazing reveries on the west wall—and had put pen to paper even. But, like a simple-minded town councillor all the world over, he had no small opinion of his powers of eloquence, and so he awaited the tongue's opportunity.

It had not come by the day before her departure ; but he had hopes that it would that

night at the Citizens' Ball, the red-letter event of the season, at which Beatrix had consented to shine. The gaiety of the town's society was to be eclipsed the following forenoon, when she took her seat in the Royal mail.

I think I see that tall, handsome figure among his ships that day, stumbling faithfully through his duties, with Beatrix, Beatrix, Beatrix drumming in his head. As the afternoon wore on, the strain caused some heart-sinking. What if, after all, he were not able to pour into her ears those expressions of love which he had framed, and imagined he could repeat in the rapture of her presence? With that fear possessing him, so that the ships' masts went round like the key-hole of the Bailie's door, he went home and penned his epistle, addressed, with many flourishes, "To Mistress Beatrix Morley, at Bailie Malcolm's":—

"DEAR MADAM,—Pardon the liberty I take in addressing you, Acknowledging the sincerity and Ardour of a Passion thy Amiable Perfec-

tions has inclined me with, Which flame being so strongly animated by that affability and Sweetness of temper, that Graceful Mien and Deportment, and above all that unparalleled and captivating loveliness and Beauty which thou art possessed of, has so inextricably attached my Affections for Thee, that in Thy Power Depends all my Destiny either to infinite happiness or endless Misery and Solitude. The reason of my penning this was, being afraid of not meeting a favourable opportunity to express my sentiments in a verbal declaration. In hopes that this will meet with the desired Reception, is the earnest Prayer of, Dear Madam, Your faithful and Sincere Swain,

“WILLIAM OLIPHANT.”

This amorous epistle, duly copied, and sealed with his black seal,—and, if impressed with his lips also, where is the man has the right to laugh at the folly?—was delivered at Bailie Malcolm's. The servant who took it in was so overcome at the moment with the glories of

Beatrix's wardrobe that she forgot all about it, and thus it lay unnoticed while the party from the Bailie's walked, with their maids in attendance, the narrow unpaved footpath to the Tolbooth. They had to pick their steps among the pools of water, in which danced the flickering reflections of the Tolbooth Hall, turned for the nonce into a ball-room. At the foot of the stairs Trickie Morton, in cocked hat and breeches, and looking terrible with his halbert, announced them with a "Mak' room for the Bailie's leddies!" and, as they mounted, the urchins laid their dirty fingers on their cloaks, as if there was virtue in touching beauty's covering without Trickie observing them.

When Wull entered a little later, his eyes went out instantly, and yet timidly, to the top of the room where Beatrix sat. If he expected, in return, a shy shrinking glance in his direction, he was disappointed. Beatrix looked very calm in her loveliness, which outshone all the beauty Kirkcaldy could muster, and at the sight of her his love and desire welled up in his heart.

Only, her manner when he ventured to approach her, showed no change. There was nothing in her greeting to indicate how she had received his letter. There was certainly no reciprocity of his nervousness and timidity, such as she ought to have shown, he thought, in shaking the hand that had subscribed him her faithful and sincere swain. And so the big, honest, simple-minded merchant danced his dances, and felt very puzzled and unhappy through them all.

Then he overheard Kate remark that Beatrix was leaving the next morning. It seemed to him that he looked towards the most radiant corner, and that Beatrix sat in it alone. He walked up to her.

"You leave to-morrow," he said ; and she smiled a reply, with a lurking anticipation in her eyes.

"And what's my answer?" he went on abruptly, being annoyed.

She caught the tone and banished the smile. But he was bending over her.

"Beatrix, it's all true that I wrote ye. I love you."

She looked around in vexation, then dropped her fan. "Pick it up, stupid," she said ; and as he stooped to obey, while the pain of her words stounded to his heart, she rose and would have swept across the room to her cousins.

But her way was barred. A sudden commotion had arisen, and from the doorway sounded shouts and the stamping of feet. The ladies fell back in affright, and instinctively Beatrix shrank to Wull's side.

With her close to him, the infatuation gained the upper hand.

"It's nothing," he said reassuringly. "Nothing but some prisoner. They'll be bringing him to the lock-up."

As he spoke, a struggling, swearing, kicking piece of humanity was being dragged across the floor to the cells. The dancers chattered and laughed in the middle of the floor again.

Wull, still close to her, went on persistently, but in the same gentle tones—

"Is that my answer, Beatrix? I surely merited a kinder one, even if it was n't the one I hoped for."

There was something so grave and dignified in his words that he appeared in her eyes in a new light.

The Bailie was crossing the floor to where they stood.

"I did n't mean what I said," she whispered to Wull, looking up. The gawky young Scotsman had touched her womanliness into life.

"I did mean—to say—No," she went on eagerly, seeing the light of hope in his eyes; "but not—not—not that way."

"It's Rab the Smuggler," said the Bailie, at their side now. "Were ye feared, Beatrix? You look struck all of a heap."

He turned to Wull.

"The men that cotch 'm are at the door. Gang and see them."

He gave his arm to Beatrix. "I'll keep her for you till you come back." And Wull left.

"I'm not so young as I was once, or I

would be substitute for naeboddy," the Bailie said, by way of a compliment. " I canna ask you to dance. It 's like sounding a peerie when I get on the floor. I go bumming round till I bump against something."

Beatrix did not know what a peerie was ; but the Bailie did not leave you in doubt when he meant to be facetious, and she laughed with him.

Yet she was in no laughing mood. She must not look William in the face again that night, and to-morrow she would be gone. She gave a sigh of relief. Not that she feared his persistence.

The last glimpse of him she had got was when the flush of pain swept across his face as the Bailie said, " I 'll keep her for you till you come back." She could trust to his accepting his answer. Rather, she felt that he took it better than she had given it ; and therefore she was ashamed and uncomfortable, and therefore, also, in the argument of her life, ready to escape the discomfort.

"I did get a fright with all that noise," she said, turning to her companion. "I wish you would take me home. Don't tell the girls—let them have their dance. The being alone will put me all right."

By the time Wull returned, she was in her own room, with his letter in her hand, the seal unbroken. Something said to her, "You think well of him now. You will not think so well of him if you read this letter." It was really with a better instinct than usually ruled her that she flung it, unread, into the fire.

Wull spent half that night far out on the sands. Backward and forward on a long stretch he might have been seen in the moonlight—the incoming tide warning him nearer the town as it washed about his feet. Wounded love and pride lapped his consciousness, like the waves breaking monotonously on his ears.

Most people float on life's tide like boats moored in a quiet bay. They scarce know how they have got hold of principles that are good

serviceable stakes, or how strong are the chains which habit has been forging. When the storm comes, they are surprised themselves to find how fast they hold.

All night long Wull pulled at the chains. There was a terrible jabble of emotions, and it seemed to him he must be washed out to sea. But there never was any real danger. He held fast.

Even next morning he felt better, when he awoke to a clear, almost business-like, recognition that his dream was over.

When he went down to the breakfast-room, Marjory was awaiting him.

"I had a veesit from Rab Hetherwick last nicht," she told him. "Mistress Douglas has gotten a laddie."

Wull had heard this, as she knew; for Rab Hetherwick had brought the news ten days before, and he and Marjory had talked of it. But Wull's mind was running on Beatrix, and he thought that Marjory, after her fashion, was leading up to the same subject.

"Your news are nane the waur o' being old," he answered.

"The laddie's doing weel," she went on, not heeding, "and so was the mither till she met wi' an accident. If she recover, the doctor says, she maun be a cripple a' her days;" and she told him Rab's confused story, which the reader knows already.

"They've had a quarrel,—Maister Douglas and she,—Thrift says," she added.

"But I thought Thrift said she fell?" asked Wull, unable to miss the drift of the last words.

"She's boot to say 't. But it tak's nae skill to read ayont the tongue, Thrift says as weel. Hoo cud she play sic a dunt on her ain drawin'-room flair?"

"D' ye think I'll sit and listen to tales like that?" Wull cried in vexation, pushing his plate and cup from him.

"No' mair nor mysel', Maister Will'um," said Marjory, ignoring his rebuke. "Aince I heard his clash, I sent him awa', quick

enough." If she meant that she did n't let him go until she had heard all he had to tell, she was right, certainly. " But," she went on, " he's to let me ken if the leddy gets waur."

Wull had risen and leaned upon the oaken window-frame, looking down on the busy street. It was a frosty morning. Everything looked so ordinary, so commonplace, so exactly as on any morning. Grain-carts rumbled past. In front of their windows the shopkeepers were busily scraping the snow that had fallen overnight ; a few late ones, looking cold and conscious, were only removing their shutters. As he stood, the tooting of the guard's horn sounded on the air ; the next minute the mail-coach rounded the sharp bend of the street, and careered westwards. The sight sent a pang to Wull's heart. Beatrix was to join that coach ; then she would be gone for ever. Well, that dream was over. And to take its place was the old grief of years, drowned in the ecstasy of the past weeks, and

now returned with Marjory's words. As yet, the old sorrow was easier to bear than the present chagrin. It was a reason why it was better that Beatrix had rejected him. With which little sop he tried to satisfy his wounded pride.

But Jean Oliphant a cripple, dying—already dead, it might be! There was no cure for that old family sore.

"Come and tak' your breakfast," said Marjory, coaxingly, at his elbow. "You're as white's a sheet," she added, as he turned to her.

"O Marjory," he said, looking down into her face, "*you* ken better nor think Dug needed to hurt her."

The descent to melodrama is easy in life as in literature. There was a touch of it in his next words—

"Each ane must dree his weird."

But Marjory had long identified herself with the troubles of her master's house, and she knew the depths from which his appeal came.

"My poor man!" was all she could say, as if she had been speaking to a child; "and oors is a sair ane."

The Malcolm girls spoke out bitterly, of course, about their cousin's conduct to Wull. Their father, to their indignation, did not join them in their strong speaking. Men, when appealed to in such a case, may not sneer at the woman; but they are pretty certain to laugh at the man. Almost always in middle-aged men there is a flavour of cynicism which acts as an excellent antidote to sentimentalism.

The Bailie contented himself with saying—

"It's maybe just as well she's awa'. It's an ill browst they've aye made that married an Oliphant."

Therein he did no more than reflect the opinion of the coffee-room, which the news from Eden Braes and Wull's disappointment (the gossips knew everything that went on) had caused to crop up afresh. He could not quite abstain from magnifying his own importance through Beatrix, and let fall hints to his

cronies about the "big marriage" she was going to make. And these boasts, reaching Wull's ears, brought with them some ease, if not exactly comfort.

Meanwhile Rab Hetherwick brought regular news of Thrift's mistress, until Jean was able, with what results we have seen, to entertain her husband's guests. By that time things were jogging on in much their old way in the little town. So it seemed to Wull. They had not changed, indeed, because love's dream had flashed across his grey sky only to leave it greyer. Why should they? The world goes on its way, heedless of the waning or the rising of bright stars. Yet everywhere hearts leap and grow heavy. Wull, you see, was like the little boy I told you of, who could not believe that anything unusual could happen to him, without his fellow-men changing their ways with his.

CHAPTER VII.

SEVEN years have gone past—time enough for a grand passion to recover. Time enough, even, to allow of its laughing at itself in its sleeve, as when, for example, it bows deeply to Beatrix when she returns—on a gentleman's arm this time,—and justifying Providence, which sent wounds to its pride, so sufficiently healed now that an interchange of snuff-boxes with the lady's husband does not make them even tender. "A pleasant affable gentleman, the owner of the snuff-box, but not what you would call brilliant, and not at all courtly," says the decrepit Grand Passion, rejected for want of manners, remember. "Not quite . . . " But there! The standard of comparison is ridiculously high.

The fever quite gone, beyond the danger of a relapse, we are not likely to take it again ; and in the thought there is some consolation for a pock-pit it has left here and there. Still, it has made a difference. We look to our boot-soles more carefully, and put flannel next our skin as certainly as the autumn fair falls, and require our night-cap—with the lemon carefully measured—more regularly, and enjoy it more. When love's fever is over we think less highly of self, but see all the more reason for taking care of it. We no longer spell life with a woman's name ; but we spell many other things into it,—creature-comforts, money, habits that have become pleasures with repetition ; oftener, perhaps, than we think, the fear of death.

To some such condition did Wull reach during these seven years. His fever, gone past the danger of relapse, left its tempering effects on his character, on his habitude, in an aging before its time, a firmer settlement in business, a hugging of life just when there had vanished

from it the glamour which made it worth the living.

For a man of thirty odds this was, in any case, a sad state of matters. Happily, being the result of circumstances, and not of any depravity, it was not past remedy. As the end of the seven years came a new lease of life and love and interests ; and Marjory Bain, the old housekeeper, brought it about.

Marjory, like most of her class, was a saving body, and had a respectable nest-egg laid up against the hazard of old age. That, as long as an Oliphant lived, a crust to eat and a roof above her head was secured, she knew well. But it was against the spirit of Scotswomen in her position to be dependent on their masters ; besides, frugality was a virtue. Consequently, when Marjory was laid past from active service, and felt that her days were numbered, the disposition of her little effects began to worry her. She had nieces who kept a toy-shop in a neighbouring town ; they were to share her savings. To gossips and ac-

quaintances legacies of numerous trifles were to be left. But as she sat through the long days, by the kitchen-window,—she could move about but little now,—looking out on the garden, and the church and churchyard beyond, and her little estate there, as she used to say, she had other thoughts as well. There were heavy memories of both happy and sad times in the family since she had entered its service. Nature has strange ways. Have you ever noticed the level rays of the afternoon sun feel their way to your heart, and soften it, if it needed softening, or make it tender if it had grown selfish in the heat of the day? And has not the afternoon of life, the quiet sunny afternoon before the twilight falls, a mellowing influence on the soul that has soon to face the darkness? As Marjory sat there, at any rate, there stole into her mind the thought, and then the fearful hope, that her little affairs might be the means of bringing the sons of the family together.

When winter came she took to her bed. She

had every attention, but there is no cure save one for age. Willy treated her as he might have treated an aunt or an elder sister, visiting her room each morning, and when he returned from business each afternoon. With his cheery "How d' ye feel thi' day?" he raised her spirits, even when her reply was, "I 'm grow-in' weary."

"Nonsense, woman!" he would say. "A's no' tint that 's in hazard. The house 's no' in ashes when the lum 's afire. We 'll ha'e ye but the kitchen afore long."

One morning she said to him—

"You 've been kind, kind to me. I 'm maist ashamed to ask another favour."

He kept her hand in his, and, drawing a chair to the bedside, sat down beside her. The action belied his cheery words.

She told him of all her wishes: about her burial, and her trinkets, and her will lying in the desk at her head. Then, with a trembling, fearful look in her eyes, she watched the effect of the *grand coup*—the first strategy, the last

charity of the seventy years which had brought her to her bed at last.

“ I ’ve made you and Maister Douglas my trustees. Could I no’ set eyes on him afore I dee ? ”

For a second habit guided him, and he looked, indifferently yet searchingly, into her eyes, like a man accustomed to level his wits with other men every day of his life. The next, all the artifice of her love lay bare for him. There was a lump in his throat, for the first time for many a day, as he said the word and gave her hand the pressure that told her that her hope was his.

But would Douglas come? Her message was away to him with Rab Hetherwick. She knew that he might not come : that, even if he did, it could not be for a day or two. Yet the carrier was not half-way on the road to Eden Braes when her ears watched for the well-known step that had been absent on the stair so long.

“ I ’m expectin’ Maister Douglas from Eden

Braes to see me, ane o' they days," she told the maid who had been called in, when she grew feeble, to assist in the household work. She said, "I'm expectin' Douglas," as if she spoke of an everyday event. What girl brought up as this one was, within sight of the ships' masts at the pier, had not heard of Douglas Oliphant—of his good looks, which he carried like the Prince of Darkness, of all his story? Therefore, she lied to the maid with trembling words, and gave her instructions what she was to do when he came, if he did come: to hold open the door, as to her master, and send him to Marjory's room. He had not forgotten the way to Marjory's room, surely.

Then she lay back in her bed and listened for the coming of a reconciliation. And even as she lay and listened, another heart in Eden Braes, crippled and wellnigh breaking, tremblingly followed Douglas as he rode along the frosty highway to the sea. Was the dark cloud about to show its silver lining now? It had been dark, surely at its darkest, a

few nights ago, when Jean bared her bleeding heart to Douglas. But to-day he had told her of Rab's message; and she had the woman's wit to be silent as he rode forth to obey it, and, in patience, waited the dawn.

From here and there, as he rode between the hedgerows on the hill above Kirkcaldy, Douglas caught a peep of the grey walls, and the small deep windows in them, of his old home. The real thing lacks the colour of the thing hoped for: the old house seemed to have no special welcome for him. When he had stabled his horse, and walked eastwards, he met none of his old friends. A new generation had grown up, and did not seem to recognise him, though many of them looked hard. He had recollections of one such walk years ago. Perhaps he felt it hard that always it should be he who returned after long absence. And then—that dark bend in the stair. He mounted the steps quickly after that ugly recollection. Evidently Marjory heard him, for the maid had the

door open in a second, so that he scarce seemed to have knocked for admission to his old home, but was sent directly to Marjory's room. Instinctively he carried his hat and whip with him there.

Marjory's heart went out to the first-born as soon as he darkened the doorway. When he laid his hand kindly on the thin, shrivelled one on the coverlid, she would fain have drawn the handsome face closer to her for one long look at it; but she restrained her feelings that she might spare his.

"Tak' a chair," she said, with the instinct of a servant. The next minute she added, "This is my corner in the hoose, whaur I may entertain." Thus she restrained her love from striking home in reproach. Once only she unsheathed it.

"Forby twa or three bit things to my acquaintance, my a' gangs to my ain friends. Ah! Maister Douglas, I've lived a while in the world, and I've learned there's nane sae near as yer ain kin after a'. I

want you," she went on, "you and Maister Willy, to be trustees o' my bawbees. Ye'll no conter me in that?"

"No, no, Marjory : Wull and I'll manage."

She could have cried for very joy.

"There's some refreshment for you in the dining-room. Here, Maggie!"

The girl came at her call, half afraid to lift her eyes to face this wicked hero of a dozen fireside tales. The shapley legs, incased in buckskin and polished top-boots, sprawling across the floor as he leant over Marjory's bed—these she saw first, and they were indicative to her untutored mind of handsome profligacy.

"Tak' Maister Douglas to his ain room," Marjory said, as if she had not primed the girl for that message. "We ken't as your room still," she said, looking at Douglas, and smiling.

And there, as she had said, was his room, even as he had left it. The old prints were on the wall, the black-letter volumes of plays on the shelf, the stag's horns above the fireplace,

flanked with the rusty naval swords, about which the aroma of bloodshed and romance still hung.

When he had washed, he came to the dining-room and sat down to eat. While there a step sounded on the stair, and passed the door to the kitchen. He knew that it was Wull's step; and Marjory recognised it of course, and picked up Douglas's whip, as Wull entered, and waved it above her head, like a child, with tears in her eyes.

Wull grew red, and then pale.

"He's at his meat in the dining-room, waitin' you. Gang in an' see him. Oh, he's a braw, braw man."

But Wull had gone. She heard the dining-room door open, and Wull's voice, shakily, "Dug." Then the door closed on the reconciliation, and we may keep it closed.

Spring in the air, spring in the hedgerows, spring in the blackbird's song, spring in Wull's heart, as two months later he rode into Eden

Braes. In the steading stood a boy and a girl—the girl a fair red-and-white beauty already. Here, evidently, were his nephew and niece.

He led up his horse to where they stood, and, addressing the boy, said—

“Who are you, little man?”

“I ’m de laird of all de byres, and Jean’s de laird of all de cows.”

Wull looked laughingly from the little fellow to his sister.

“And this is Jean, I suppose?” he said.

“And who’s you?” the boy asked, nodding.

“My name’s the same as yours, if I mistake na,” Wull answered. “I ’m called Willy Oliphant.”

“Here’s the other Willy,” cried the boy, running up to Jean, and clapping his hands.

Then she addressed him :

“Father’s hunting, and won’t be home till dark. But mamma’s in the house. She’s always in the house,” she added sadly. “I ’ll take you to her.”

Already her brother was leading the way to the stable.

"Come and see my doos," he cried.

"Afterwards. We 'll see your doos by-and-by," Wull said, stroking the fair hair.

When he had stabled his horse, they took him indoors. Jean heard their steps mixing with a heavier one, and with a bright flash of recognition knew that it was Wull's.

She never felt the cruelty of her accident more than now, when she could not go to meet him. Her children led him to her, and she kept his hand in hers a minute as she looked at him. Then, with the least possible tremor, she said—

"You 're not changed ae bit, Willy."

"And you?" was the natural sequence of his thoughts. With a touch of that loutishness which Beatrix scorned, he kept looking at her with her great round eyes.

"You must n't stare at my grey hairs in that way, Wull. You 're not a lady's man,—that 's clear."

She was the old Jean.

Then they fell to speak of the seed-time, and the play of the season, but never a word of their years of winter or of the new spring that was budding. At length Wull said, anxious to get out to the fresh air for a little,—

“I’ll go out and see Willy’s doos. I promised to do so as soon as I had shaken hands.”

And she bade her little girl run out with them—so that she might get a “good long think,” as she said to herself.

The *Sturm und Drang* period seemed passed in the lives of the three people who sat round the fire when the children had gone to bed. They sat close over the coals, as the habit is at the end of the night or at the end of the winter ; the two men a little aimless, not having their pipes in Jean’s room, and Wull not able to keep his eyes off her grey hair.

“No word of a new housekeeper down bye, Wull?” she said once, when she caught his glance.

“Marjory’s very frail,” he replied. “But I can’t get a new one as long as she lives.”

"But I meant——" she said, with a smile, while Douglas drew in his sprawling feet, feeling a little uncomfortable.

"Oh, I see," said Wull. "No, no: I'm too old! I'm not a lady's man: you yourself told me."

Douglas wondered when.

"D' ye mind me teaching you your history in the garret, Wull?"

"Ay, fine!" he replied, bending a hot face over the coals. All afternoon he had been comparing these grey locks and sad eyes with the locks and the eyes which he worshipped then. He was half afraid that she was going to grant him his wish now. But she only said, with half a laugh, half a sigh,—

"It's a long time since that—for married folks. But you're a young man yet."

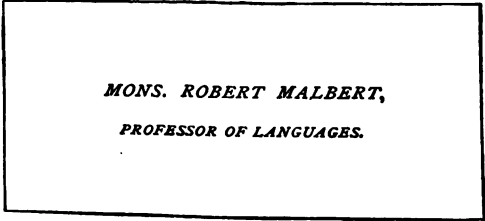
And "Heigh-ho, well-a-well," Wull said, leaning back in his chair, and clasping his hands behind his head. They all looked silently into the embers, and had their own thoughts.

And then, and the next morning, when she waved her hand to Wull as he rode out of Eden Braes, Jean felt happy in the thought that the winter was over, and the summer days had come.

PART II.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE second door on Kirkcaldy High Street, west from the house of the Oliphants, was mounted with a brass plate, on which was inscribed, in a rather flowery style of lettering :



*MONS. ROBERT MALBERT,
PROFESSOR OF LANGUAGES.*

That brass plate was as old, or nearly as old, as the bit of family history which I have been narrating. Since its appearance, fifteen years

before, gave some pretensions to the humble house it adorned, the very daintiest knuckles in and about the town had knocked on the panel above it; for the Mons. Malbert whose avocation it announced had made a reputation for himself in imparting a knowledge of languages, and especially of the French which is of Paris. During all these years there had lived with this popular professor his niece Margrédel; at no time any other save the nurse-girl whose services her age required. A day was to come when it was a strange thought to Wull Oliphant that they and he, whose fortunes were so linked with one another, for years should have spent sunny hours in neighbouring gardens, and passed and repassed on the old street, without so much as interchanging a word or even a nod. As it was, he knew neither more nor less than his neighbours about this little French household.

Any one could have told you that Robert Malbert had been wounded in the wars, and brought to England as a prisoner of war. The

country had been full of prisoners. Every well-to-do youth in the town could recall a holiday when he went to the castle in Edinburgh on his father's hand to see the Frenchies plaiting their straw ornaments. Fewer knew that it was on the other side of the Firth, in Penicuik, that his prison-house had been. And why, when he went back to France on the conclusion of the Peace, he had returned to Scotland, why he had settled in Kirkcaldy, or who this little Margrédél English, his sister's child, he gave out, really was—these were points upon which the subtlest inquiries could not induce him to give any information. His manner, indeed, was taciturn and gruff. He repulsed rather than invited overtures of friendship, and sometimes so fiercely that the hardiest were afraid to make them afresh. He might have been won through the child, had he not kept her entirely to himself, devoting to her all the time that was not occupied with his teaching, and, apparently, not a little of the affection which he denied his neighbours.

At the end of fifteen years Margrédel had grown into a woman ; but the secrets of her history, if it had any, remained unsolved. The townspeople had ceased to make the advances which he might have met more frankly now, and sent their children to the French teacher for the benefits they derived from him, allowing him and his niece to lead their retired life without more than a stray comment thereon.

It was left to little Jean Oliphant (not so little now, but a tall, comely lass about to leave school) to break down the reserve which they practised.

Even as in the early days after their marriage, all Cupar and Edenside took an interest in the laird of Eden Braes and his pretty little wife, so they began to look with kindly eyes on their children, when the two, Jean on her dapple grey and Willy on the brown pony, clattered over Cupar causeway on their way to Dominie Skinner's school in the Crossgate. Without rising from their tables, the folks in the houses they passed noted their arrival.

It was as good as chimes—so they said—the long stride of the grey, the pittar-patter of Willy's pony. And when, by reason of sickness or stress of weather, the children remained at home, as sometimes happened, the sense of fitness in some minds was as much disturbed, the domestic economy of many families as much upset, as if the town clock had struck work over night.

In the school itself there were no fine social distinctions. The humblest burgher's boy and the squire's son sat side by side if they spelled their name with the same initial letter. Jean Oliphant from Eden Braes, and other Jeans, whose fathers and mothers sold candles or baby-linen, were all the same to the dominie. He addressed them as Jean this-or-that or as Dame this-or-that, according as what followed was by way of encouragement or chiding; but his favours and rebukes were distributed with the same impartiality with which, in his half-yearly visitations, he drank the chandler's ale or the squire's claret. If any bias was

hinted against him ever, it was by the favoured side towards whom he leaned. All boys are cynics when the schoolmaster is the text. At the end of a heavy day's caning, while none of the recipients, of course, allowed their deserts, it was generally left to the fortunate one who was passed over to suggest the strange coincidence of that fact with the other, that he was the bearer of a message to his parents that that night was set aside by the dominie for his periodical call.

In the same way there was, among the children themselves, an *esprit du corps* which no social differences interfered with—even as their fathers, and indeed Fife men generally, were “a’ John Tamson’s bairns” in sport and in games. Among the humbler families, as among the gentlest, the parents had a tacit understanding that no shadow on the reputation of father or sister or brother should prevent equal attention being paid to all children whom their own boys and girls delighted to reckon their friends.

Undoubtedly some such shadows did rest upon the household at Eden Braes ; the sharp one cast by Douglas's conduct, and those, less defined, by slander and a half-mysterious tradition. In spite of them, the lonely woman, tied to her chair, had kept the sympathy of the neighbouring families always ; and just on their account it was, perhaps, that so many motherly hearts were beating beneath both silks and homespuns with a special " liking " for her children. With Jean and Willy running in and out among them, with their frank and innocent talk, they wondered at first that so much goodness could come out of Eden Braes, and then that so much goodness must have been there always without their perceiving it. Their own girls had stories of the prettiness and goodness of Jean's mother, their boys of the splendid fellow that Douglas Oliphant was. Children are like butterflies, flying to and fro between our homes, carrying the seeds of reputations. And in this way the shadows began to disperse.

It must be confessed that the curriculum at the dominie's school was not so wide as the charity, and Jean soon exhausted it. She was just blossoming into the charms of young-womanhood, and, like other girls of her age and position, would in ordinary circumstances have been sent to one of the boarding-schools in the capital, where the budding of these charms—a stage in woman-culture known as “finishing”—was supposed to be best attended to. But her mother said “No.” There was deserving pride, and a good argument to boot, when she instanced herself as a woman who had had no finishing, and yet was mistress of all womanly acquirements. The real reason, patent to all, was that she did not wish Jean away from her side. Nor did Douglas. “Trying to be good”—a child's phrase—is no child's play. Douglas Oliphant indeed had turned over a new leaf,—not spotless, not immaculate, but fair compared with that preceding it,—and (to continue the figure) his daughter Jean was his little bookmark. He

was afraid that he might lose the place if Jean were sent away.

Still, her education ought not to be neglected, and Professor Malbert's fame had reached Eden Braes. At Marjory's death Thrift Hetherwick had taken her place as Wull's housekeeper—an arrangement which Mrs. Oliphant carried through in order to bind still closer the newly united households, as well as to have Jean's attendance upon herself. Kirkcaldy seemed near at hand compared with Edinburgh. Jean could easily stay at her uncle's house—Wull was overjoyed at the proposal—with Thrift to look after her comfort, and Douglas could ride down for her any day, should they grow weary or should necessity for her return arise. So it came about that during some months Jean was her Uncle Wull's little housekeeper, and attended, with other young ladies in and about Kirkcaldy, the classes of the irascible French teacher.

It was in the old town, then, in Douglas's own home that Jean blossomed from the

school-girl into a woman. A fresh arrangement of the hair and a few inches added to her skirts, under the superintendence of Kate Malcolm, effected this.

She worked steadily at her study of languages, and learned to play a little on the spinet which her uncle bought for her. She did not prove herself very brilliant in any of her accomplishments, but she charmed all by her frank delight at being taken notice of. She did the honours of her uncle's house with simplicity, not unmixed with the anxiety of the young housekeeper ; and there still live many, or at least did live in my day, who have spoken to me most kindly of their recollection of the tall, handsome, almost buxom girl who was "the rage" among the town families for these few months. But, perhaps, later events coloured their recollections.

By far the most important result of this visit for Jean, and therefore for us, was the friendship which sprang up between her and the girl Margrédel. I do not know when or where or

how they met ; but the summer months were not past before they could have been seen, almost any day, pulling flowers together in the old, overrun garden. Unlike Jean, Margrédél did not go out into the town's society ; but when the days crept in they spent together the afternoons at least, in the wainscoted dining-room, Jean instructing her friend in needlework, or stitching busily herself, while Margrédél read aloud to her.

Even as the Oliphants' garden has always seemed to me a sweet retreat from the busy causeway, so does the thought of these two lives, blossoming in their opening day among the scent of roses and honeysuckles and prickly eglantine, or in the big deep-shadowed room, with its history of human passion, seem a sweet retreat from the memories of this sordid town, as you and I know it to have been. They chose to love each other, these two, as they chose their flowers : Margrédél the homely, fragrant ones, Jean those rarer and more delicate, reminding her of Margrédél.

One thing which made their friendship more noticeable was their likeness to each other. Not a great many people perhaps observed it: not the young beaux about the town, for example, who studied their faces more than most, and were left blind to everything but Margrédel's beauty. For straight as an arrow, and tall and handsome as an Oliphant, though Jean was, she could not compare with the French girl.

But the likeness had struck Wull, and when Thrift remarked one day that they might pass for sisters—

“Have *you* noticed that, Thrift?” he said. “I’ve often thought I saw a look o’ Jean in this Margrédel.”

“A look!” replied Thrift. “They’re jist neebours. And it’s the auld horse and the fail-dyke owre again—like draws to like—for I never seed twa so close as they twa.”

On one of these afternoons, as they sat over their work, Jean said, repeating an oft-made invitation,—

"You must come and see me in Eden Braes. Mamma is just beautiful at needle-work."

"Is she like you?" asked Margrédél. Then, laying down her sewing, she said wistfully, "I wonder if I'm like my mother?"

"Don't you remember your mamma?" said Jean.

Margrédél shook her head.

"I must be very unlike other girls," she said. "Do you think so? I have begun to think that—at least, since ever you came. As far back as I can remember, I have lived here with uncle."

"And never gone to France?"

"No. Oh, I have read about France, and thought of it, and longed to go there," Margrédél said, clasping her hands. "But uncle gets angry with me when I say I will go home some day. 'This is your home,' he says, and walks about the room in bad humour, and talks to himself."

Then she went on: "I think he must have quarrelled with my mother's friends, And I'm

half-English too. My home is partly here, after all," she added, as if she were meditating with herself.

"Of course it is," said Jean; "any one would take you for a Scots girl. You speak like one of us."

"And then my father was an Englishman," Margrédél said, still half to herself.

"An Englishman?" said Jean. "Where did he come from? How strange!"

"Hush! You must n't tell uncle I told you this," Margrédél said hastily.

"No. But your name is English—Margrédél English, is it not?"

"Yes. Why? Is it not an English name? Is that so? O Jean, there's something queer about it all. I never thought of it till you came. It was once when he was in anger about my wanting to go to France that he told me my father was English. And then he laughed a strange laugh—I remembered it all afterwards—and stroked my hair; and his hand shook as if he were in a rage all the

same, and he said that my father might have been a Frenchman, and not to say to any one that he was not, and that Englishmen were *coquins*. He was angry, angry. That was long ago, Jean; and it's all come back to me since you came and spoke to me about your home and your father and mother."

It was dark outside the little windows now, and only by the irregular light of the fire did Jean see the perplexity on Margrédel's face; nor did she understand it, or the half of what her friend had so rapidly recited.

When Margrédel rose to go, Jean pressed her to remain and spend the evening.

"I cannot," Margrédel explained. "My uncle would miss me. We play the game of backgammon each evening, and, *ma foi*, if I disappointed him!" and she made a little sign with her crossed fingers. "He would be worse even than if I won a gammon."

Wull entered as she spoke, and Jean said, "All uncles are cross except ——" and she made a mocking courtesy to her uncle,

“Here’s Margrédel frightened that her uncle will be cross if she spends the evening with me,” she continued. Wull and Margrédel shook hands.

“Uncle Robert is not an ogre,” Margrédel said to him. “You must n’t think that ; but he is lonely, and would miss me if I were n’t home for our game.”

“Backgammon,” Jean explained.

“He has no friend but me. And you are my only friend—but him,” she added, with a burst of affection, linking her arm in Jean’s.

They were just of a height—the two girls—and, as they stood side by side in the darkening, it seemed to Wull that they were very like each other.

“Would not Monsieur Malbert” (how badly he pronounced the “Monsieur,” to be sure) “also spend the evening with us?” he asked. “I would challenge him to a game.”

The sensitive French girl felt a touch of resentment at the idea of her affectionate out-

burst being mistaken for an appeal for friendship ; but his kindly smile disarmed it.

“ May I ask him ? ” she said, with real gratitude.

“ Nay,” Jean interposed ; “ I will ask him. Monsieur Malbert cannot refuse me anything ; ” and she skipped off for her hat. She was conscious of that winning way which was her mother’s before her. And she was justified, inasmuch that Monsieur Malbert did come in the evening, and found his match in Wull. In the course of his play the professor discovered to Jean and her uncle a certain eagerness in his ways, although, perhaps, backgammon is not a fair test of tranquillity. For, being very eager to score a gammon, and being as great a snuffer as he was a player, he emptied his snuff-mull by mistake for his dice-box into the board, and would not hear of its being swept until that game was finished, so that those which followed were made somewhat uncomfortable for Wull by reason of sneezing. Margrédel was evidently very happy, and rallied

her uncle gently, calling their game the battle of the sneezes, and keeping near him when his excitement and his voice were highest. Wull and Jean both remarked the professor's fondness for his niece and her influence over him, and, when their guests were gone, spoke of it together.

CHAPTER IX.

IN the summer, Jean returned to Eden Braes the same natural girl she was when she left it. Had it been otherwise, had he found her become a "very proper miss," as he had found more than one tomboy of the district after a year away at school, her brother Willy would have accepted the fact with all its consequences. Among these would have been disappointment and a great expenditure of boyish sarcasm. As it was, however, he noticed no change on Jean except her more womanly mode of dressing. She was ready to be his companion, as of old, entered into all his sports and games, and was a match for him any day when mounted on a horse's back. She was a splendid horsewoman, had magnifi-

cent courage, and stuck at nothing. His sister was a jewel of a girl, Willy thought ; and many other girls' brothers also thought so, as they saw her galloping between the hedges.

One thing nettled him, however. The neighbouring families recognised her as a woman now, and invited her out with the elders, while treating him as the school-boy that he was still. This he did not relish. It went against the grain with him to remain a boy, after Jean had ceased to be a girl.

"I'll be away from school at the end of this year," he said to Rab Hetherwick.

His father was his final authority on the hunting of otters or on the clearing of fences ; but in Rab he confided any difficulties which required philosophic treatment.

"They don't ask *me* to their dancing-parties," he explained ; and added, "Of course, I would n't go if they did."

Thereupon Rab, who at the moment was on the top of his cart unpacking some goods,

turned his back on Willy and winked to the world at large. This is how many of us take care to guard the sensibilities of our neighbours.

“There’s a parcel from Thrift to Miss Jean,” he said later. He had visited Kirkcaldy on the previous day, and this morning, already, had been to Cupar delivering his goods. That was how Willy fell in with him on his way to school.

“There’s a parcel for Miss Jean from Thrift, and she says to tell her that the young lads about Kirkcaldy are like a wheen weet spunks sin’ she left.”

The simile was so clearly Rab’s, that the sentiment also may be taken for his. Rab was brilliant in his conversation at the expense of the decalogue.

“‘Thrift,’ says I,” he continued, “‘it’s ill praising green barley. They’ll no’ keep her long up-bye ; but it’s no Kirkcaldy that’ll get her. She’ll marry a hereaboot man, or I’m cheated, just as young Maister Willy,’

says I, 'I'll be bringing hame some Cupar lass by-and-by.' "

It was part of Rab's sardonic humour to make his compliments always embarrassing. Willy could reply to this one only by saying, with some schoolboy sheepishness—

"Ho! ho! There's no one would have me."

"Devil a fear!" cried Rab, with great conviction. "They're no' so shy as Eden trout—the women. That's a mistake maist lads mak', and live to see correckit. Women!" And the old carrier shook his head in a way that seemed to say, "I could a tale unfold."

"I'll give Jean Thrift's parcel and her message, at any rate," Willy said, making as if to go.

"Do that. But you'll see I'm richt. Man, the lads i' this pairt begin to haud up their heids if the young leddy's within a mile o' them. The missus was telling me."

"Tuts!" cried Willy. "Marg'et knows too much." Willy was well aware that,

when Jean came shopping to Cupar of an afternoon, and he had saddled his pony, after school, to escort her home, it was with difficulty that they could get away from the young beaux who hung about the pavement for a word from her. And even when they got clear of the town, and had a grand scamper along the highroad, their fun was spoiled, as often as not, by the appearance of this or that young farmer or laird, who was anxious for Jean's smiles, though he had not a word for Willy, and, it might be, scarcely recognised his father, for that matter. And even if these people did not join them, meeting them meant more demureness of pace, and the pushing back of flying locks which to Willy represented the school-girl in his sister. Than love, there is no more delicate topic in the world broached between brothers and sisters; and when even a father twits his daughter about the men, the blood will rise to her brother's eyes as readily as to her own, and he could not change the subject quicker

if he himself were being rallied. That, I take it, was why Willy did not wish to hear any of Marg'et Hetherwick's gossip about his sister Jean, but said with some annoyance—

“Marg'et knows too much.”

“Right, ” replied Rab, as impressively as he could, for during his conversation his horse had wandered to the roadside and jerked a wheel into a ditch. “Wo-back, ye jade!” he cried, seizing the reins when he had recovered his balance: then he introduced the incident into his arguments.

“Right. D'ye see that mare? She'll scart her nose in fifty whinbusses, on the chance o' finding a wusp o' hay in ane o' them. That's Marg'et.”

Having paused, like a preacher who has given out his text, to allow it to sink into the mind of his audience, he proceeded to amplify his statement.

“There was when Sergeant Snooks cam' coortin' Thrift—Snooks as was wont to be in Cupar. Marg'et had watched Thrift and

better watched her, and she cam' on them at last. Certy! There was a fine strabush. Snooks said he'd be demned if he'd court a girl under her mither's nose, and Thrift cam' to me about it; but her mither said, Would I alloo my dochter to marry an Englishman, a raskil that swore at her, and said 'dem' in place o' 'dam'? I didna' see mysel' that it mattered hoo he said it, provided he meant it, though for expressiveness I maun say I think 'dam' has the heels o't. But she had her way, and she was richt. Snooks forgot himsel' wi' drink. Maister Willium, mind that. They're always richt—the women—though it's no' in the nature o' man to extrack much comfort from that thought."

On the afternoon of the same day Rab saddled Plus and Minus (for so Mrs. Oliphant, in hilarious mood in her young days, had christened the cuddies), and went down the den for wood. It was a beautiful June day. The river was babbling between the banks of wild-

rhubarb, the foliage was of the clearest green, and the birds were happy in it; and on the shadow-mottled road under the yellow rocks, where the water fell from the height, a horseman was slowly sauntering towards him.

“ Who comes here ?
A bold grenadier,”

hummed Rab. “ Captain Hill o’ the ‘ Pork and Peas,’ ” he said, addressing himself in his usual way to Plus and Minus. “ Studying geology—him and his beast—ye might think,” he went on, “ and a naternal enough mistake for you that ’s no’ accustomed to that kind o’ scientific res’arch.”

By this time he had drawn near Captain Hill, who was sitting very straight, but still advanced at a snail’s pace. The carrier answered his “ Good day,” and then said to the cuddies, loud enough for the Captain to hear, “ Gentlemen, ye ’ll best be stapping to the side, and let the young leddy by that ’ll be coming roond the corner ;” and held on his road with

a grin on his face. It had not died away when there was a clatter of hoofs, and Jean galloped up.

"Is Marg'et at home, Rab?" she asked, drawing up a little as she passed the carrier. At the same moment she noticed the figure in front, and stopped altogether for his answer. When she got it she rode forward slowly, and Rab, looking round as he turned the corner, saw Jean and the Captain ride up the den together.

"What extraordinary man is that!" the Captain asked her. "I saw you speak to him, Miss Oliphant."

"Extraordinary?" laughed Jean. "Everybody hereabout knows Rab and his cuddies. I was asking him if his wife is at home. I'm going to see her, and I go up here."

She had stopped where there was the break in the rocks, and the paths wound up among the trees.

"But I see no road," he said, "You can't ride up the face of that brae!"

“ Oh, yes, I can. It 's not so steep as it looks, if you follow the zigzag pathway and come out at the church. Have yon not seen it? ”

“ No,” he replied. “ May I go with you? ”

“ Oh, yes,” Jean said, quite frankly. “ It 's worth seeing. I 'll go first and show you the way.”

As she entered the path she turned to him. “ You can trust your horse? It 's a little dangerous.”

“ Where duty calls,” he replied with a laugh, striking a little attitude. With most girls this would have been an opportunity, not to be lost, for paying a neat compliment. But Jean was not like most girls, as this astute and sensitive young Fencible officer had observed on the different occasions he had for studying her character. She had inherited none of her mother's turn for repartee, and did not seem to care to receive compliments. And for his watchfulness, and his respect for her simple earnestness, Captain Hill was rewarded by Jean's very good will.

A short scramble along the winding path-way brought them to the top of the wood. The road which they had left took a turn to the right. Round the plateau on which they now stood, the bank of rock and trees which skirted it was wound like a mighty arm, holding it tight against the hill which rose, a field's-breadth away, sheer upwards to where the little hamlet of Blebo lay basking in the sun. And on this plateau, even where they stood, was the wooden gate that led to the little church of Kemback, which looked, in its ivy cloak, as peaceful as the graves that lay around it. Among the trees to the right the smoke of the Hetherwicks' cottage rose straight to the sun. The murmur of the river, a woodman's axe among the trees, the village sounds from far-off Blebo Crag, made the silence bearable; and any mourner might have felt that he laid his dead a little nearer God when he brought them to this quiet kirkyard in the elbow of the hill.

One less imbued with the romantic senti-

ment, with less appreciation of natural beauty, than Captain Hill, would have been struck with the unique character of the scene.

"A bonny spot, is it not, and worth the scramble?" Jean said, breaking in upon his wonder.

"That it is indeed," he replied. "Who would think it from the road! I have ridden down the den fifty times, and never dreamed that there was such a spot at the top. I shall not soon forget this afternoon's ride."

So they chatted for a time, till Jean remembered that if she did not hasten, Marg'et might have gone out.

"How do you go to the cottage? Along the field-side?" he asked.

"Yes."

"But—a false step. It is horrible to think of it. I shall see you along."

"No, no," she cried. "I know every step. We know,—don't we, Vic?" she went on, patting her horse's neck.

"What a lovely girl!" he said to himself,

as she leaned forward in her saddle. The impression of the landscape had fled, and he had eyes for nothing but Jean. When she turned, his look of admiration still lingered on his face. Perhaps he was careful that it should. A faint blush rose to her cheek.

"There's no road by the cottage," she said at once. "You must go down as you came."

"Good-bye, then." He lifted his hat. "Maybe you will show me other new and charming retreats ere long."

As he turned his horse's head, the animal became restive, probably at the sight of the tree-tops almost at its nose.

"You had better lead your horse down," Jean cried after him, as she stood and watched. "I ride; but then Vic knows the way."

But he, picking his way among the trees already, did not hear her, and she set out at a walk to the Hetherwicks'.

Captain Hill rode down cautiously; but near the foot his reins slackened with his carefulness. At the moment a blackbird flew across the

path, frightening his horse, which reared. It slipped upon the edge of the path, and only righted itself with an effort that threw Frank badly on his shoulder.

When he came to himself he was on the edge of the road, and there was a rumbling of carts in his ears. Then he became aware of a voluble torrent of oaths, and the old carrier stood over him.

“Miss Jean! where’s Miss Jean, d’ye hear?” Rab was shouting now.

“Miss Jean,” the Captain said, with closed eyes; then he remembered what had happened.

“She’s up there,” he said, raising himself and pointing up the den instead of above him.

“My God! There!” cried the carrier, his honest face as white as a sheet, for the Captain pointed to where the rocks rose perpendicular. “Is she hurt? Has she fallen?” This was said with an accompaniment of oaths, as he shook the fallen man. But he got no answer, for the pain of attempting to rise and Rab’s

incivilities had sent Frank into unconsciousness again.

Leaving him, the carrier ran round to the rocks. " 'Thank God, she 's no' there,' " he muttered ; then he ran back to where the Captain lay. Plus and Minus had drawn in to the roadside, and were calmly grazing at his head. Rab paid no heed to them, but scrambled, as quickly as he could, up to the kirk. The last few yards were done on his hands and knees, and his blue Tam o' Shanter appeared over the brae under Vic's nose.

" Rab," cried Jean, breaking into a loud laugh at the sight he presented, " what in the world are ye doing there ? "

The laugh touched the pride of the old carrier, who a minute before would have given all he possessed to have heard it.

" It wad be for amusement to mysel', verra like," he said, blowing hard.

" Well, it was certainly for mine, Rab," she she could not help saying. " You seemed fluthered."

"I daursay," said Rab, indignantly. "I thoct by the way he pinted that ye had gaen owre the rocks."

"Me! The way who pointed?"

"The Captain. He's lying by the roadside wi' deevil a horse near 'm." Rab's tone still implied a sense of injustice done him.

"Captain Hill fallen over the brae!" Jean cried, and would have dashed down the path, had not Rab seized Vic's bridle.

"Canny, canny, m' leddy. Ca' canny," he said, hanging on hard. "He'll come roond richt enough. Nane the quicker, ony way, for your tumbling as weel."

"Let go his head, Rab!" the girl cried. "I know what I'm doing." Then, as he would not: "Well, well, I'll walk to please you. Only tell me, is it a bad fall, Rab? Is he much hurt?—tell me."

"No, no. It's jist a bit coup he's got."

"It's my fault all the same," she said. "I should not have brought him up here."

"Nae mair ye should," was Rab's honest

rejoinder. "Ye never ken whaur they things 'll end."

Which last sentiment of Rab's was very true, howsoever applied.

In the meantime Frank, whose only injury was a dislocated collar-bone, was recovering consciousness. In his dazed condition he recalled Jean's name from Rab's shouts, and then became aware of warm breath on his face. For the second before he opened his eyes, a dream of Jean's face flashed through his mind; then he looked up to see Plus and Minus sniffing close by him. He raised his uninjured arm to beat them back, then dropped it with a laugh. At the movement some one cried out—

"Well, Hill! Have you got round? Any bones broken?"

At the same time Douglas Oliphant—for it was he—drove off the cuddies and assisted Frank to his feet.

"Whew! My shoulder: I doubt it's out. Hullo, Donald," Frank went on, recognising

his horse tethered with Douglas's. "This is a nice afternoon's work."

"I found him up at the toll, and guessed that something was wrong down here. How did it happen? I'll tell you,—mount your horse and ride to Eden Braes, and have that shoulder set. I see it's out. Steady!" He was helping Frank into the saddle. "D'ye feel shaky? Where's the owner of the steeds?" He pointed to the cuddies. "He'll send for a doctor."

At that moment Rab and Jean appeared upon the path.

"Ah, Jean! Here, Jean," Douglas called to his daughter. "Captain Hill's had a spill, and I'm going to take him to Eden Braes."

"I know," Jean said, coming up with a bright look at seeing the Captain mount. "Rab told me. I should n't have taken you up. Rab told me that too. But you're not badly hurt,—are you?" she continued, noticing his lips drawn as if with pain. "I took Captain Hill to see Kemback Kirk," she explained

turning to her father, and a blush spread over her face at the explanation.

"Your daughter's fault was that she left me; and then I went wrong," Frank said, gallantly. He looked to Jean, and she laughed, and her face was rosier than ever.

"I've told you fifty times, Jean," said Douglas, "that your hardihood will lead to broken bones. Hill, here, will be laughing on the other side of his face ere the doctor's done with him. You hurry home, and send a message for the doctor at once."

Jean acquiesced in the arrangement, and galloped off, thinking that the worst thing in the world would have been to have left the Captain lying there half-dead, or with his neck broken. She was on her way to receive Frank Hill in Eden Braes, unconscious of all that was to follow that welcome.

CHAPTER X.

“GOOD morning, Miss Oliphant,” said the Captain, a few days later, giving her his left hand, for his right was still slung. “The short shadows outside” (he inclined his eyebrows to the trees on the lawn) “tell me I am late, as usual.”

“But this morning not last as usual, Captain Hill. Mother is not here yet.”

Jean poured out his coffee.

“Like her, I have an invalid’s privilege. Otherwise, your virtuous hours and industry would shame me,” he said; and he pointed to the needlework which she had laid aside.

Frank Hill, I have been told, had a way of saying things that balanced themselves betwixt the serious and the flippancy; and the tone of

his voice in saying them hovered between the two. From words and deeds of his which have come to my knowledge (and in due time you shall hear of some of them), I judge that, could you have laid back the externals of the man as you might an eyelid, you should have exposed a hundred humours in a state of inconsistency. He could have told you all about himself,—how neutral he was towards all that went on within him and around him,—but he would not have told you. It was so bad in taste to be indiscriminatingly introspective. Indiscriminatingly, observe. The most selfish thing about this selfish man was his fine taste, his sensitiveness. His compass was never adjusted to any principles; it was forever being affected by those with which he came in contact. Only, he remained neutral, as it were, like a captain who knew how his ship was apt to veer through the influence of the iron hills about him, and made allowances for the errors or inconsistency in himself. Reason fixes most of us; Frank never rea-

soned. He lived by intuition, as women live, they say.

Consequently, he studied every one whom he came across; and women most carefully, for they told you less than men, and required more delicate discrimination. At present Jean was under the lens. It was not love of reading character, you see. It was the demand of his selfishness to know how best to hold himself in the eyes of those with whom he would stand well. They were the whole world, if possible: not Rab only, but the cuddies also. In the main, his sensitiveness singled out the beautiful and the good. When he would he could sail past the most tempting beauty, without waxed ears. He went about tasting peaches, and the over-sweet ones he could detect and throw away. Selfishness is the Devil, and the Devil's gift is the knowledge of good and evil. It is not strange, therefore, that the greatest devilishness carries with it a taste for the good.

Perhaps you may think that these are too

out-of-the-way reflections for the breakfast-room at Eden Braes. But Frank's thought then was, How fresh everything looked there, with the clear sun shining among the cups and on this girl who sat at the other end of the table from him ! And if Frank Hill was the man that I have painted him (and I would do no one a wrong deliberately, least of all a man dead and buried years ago), we who follow Jean's history should know what really these thoughts of his about her mean.

“ What a simple, earnest, girlish girl ! ” he had said to himself often during these days at Eden Braes. She was a new type. Only, one had to force her into womanly relations. By womanly relations Frank meant confidential relations on the assumption of the sexes. One of the conditions in himself of which he was well aware was the heat in his blood.

“ You are laughing at my playing the invalid—in spite of this imposing bandage,” he said, shrugging his wounded shoulder, and wincing in consequence.

Even without the wince she had taken him seriously. She still blamed herself for his hurt, although he had made her blush by telling her it was the happiest accident in the world that had left him her guest at Eden Braes.

"I did not laugh," she said.

"But yes."

"No. Truly," she said.

"Why, then," he replied, "you did n't. 'A lady's "verily" 's as potent as a lord's.' Do you read Shakespeare?"

"I have read 'Ophelia.'"

"'Ophelia'? Ah! 'Hamlet.'"

"'Hamlet' I should say. But I don't remember much about anything or any one save poor Ophelia, with her rosemary and rue and daisies. Margrédel read it to me."

"Who is Margrédel? What is she?"

"Margrédel. Margrédel English. My friend Margrédel, in Kirkcaldy. We used to read to each other at our needlework—or, rather, Margrédel used to read; and once she found a book with 'Hamlet' in it, and read it to me.

I thought I saw Ophelia in her feathers strewing her flowers in the path, and her brother looking on. Poor Ophelia ! ”

Frank was surprised at the fervour with which Jean spoke. On more than one occasion Margrédél's passionate habits had struck a chord in her calmer and more stolid friend. This reading of “ Hamlet ” was one of them, and Jean spoke with a broken emotion in sympathy with the recollection of it.

The recollection would have been even more intense had Jean known that Margrédél took home the book and recited to her uncle passages from the play. Monsieur Malbert sat half asleep in his chair, and ever and again Margrédél looked up from her reading to see if he remained awake. The madness of Ophelia, however, carried her away, and she read on, unconscious of his having sat up spell-bound and eager.

At length she closed the book, and, with a half-sigh, said, “ It makes me think of Calledony, the poor woman at the harbour. ”

"Bah!" her uncle cried, springing from his chair and pacing the room.

"Girl," he said—and she trembled under his flashing eyes—"they grow as thick as grapes—maids like Ophelia. Men pluck them, suck them, spit them out. And their brothers come home too late, and find them dead—dead, and their seducers gone."

Suddenly he seized the book from her hands.

"Did Laertes kill him, girl?" he said, scanning the remainder of the story. "Did he find him? Did he kill him?"

"They killed each other," she replied meekly.

"Ah!"

"The swords were poisoned—one was—and they exchanged, and killed each other, and died friends."

"Friends!"—he laughed sarcastically. "Friends!" and he tossed the book against the wall and began pacing the room again.

"Friends when I've killed him—oh, yes,
"

good friends. What could Laertes do but run him through—through ” (here he made a thrust with his hand, and Margrédel trembled afresh), “and then die, to fight again in hell maybe.”

“Uncle !” cried Margrédel, running up to him and seizing his arm.

“Ah,” he said ; “he had no little Margrédel left ;” and yet he had to look up to the frightened face that he was patting.

So she quieted him, and picked up her book as she went up-stairs to bed. And the striking of the town clock, and the brawl coming up from the narrow street, although she had known no other sounds all her days, were strangely out of accord with the thoughts that came into her head. She felt as if she lay in a foreign city.

Of all this she said nothing to Jean. But the simple-minded Jean, fitted to be the heroine of a tragedy but not to imagine one, never forgot Margrédel’s intensity in speaking of the part of Ophelia. As we know, she had had

her own childish sorrows; they had touched her heart. She had wept with Ophelia as if Ophelia had been a sister. She knew nothing of the imaginative sympathy; and that it was which made her story to Frank so real. She was not critical. She could not understand Frank when he said—

“Ophelia or Hamlet—it matters not. Fate, overwhelming Circumstance, devoured both.”

“Yes, I see,” Jean replied slowly, as if working out the idea in her own mind. “They couldn’t help it, you mean. I never thought of that. Nor could Ophelia help it.”

“That’s tragedy,” Frank said.

“But we’re all in God’s hands, and He can make it tragedy or—comedy.” She looked a little scared at having mentioned God’s name in the same breath with comedy.

“We are all in ——” then Frank stopped.

Did he think to himself, “Do I believe that?” and marvel at his own moral nature, which had been whittled away to a point so.

fine that, knowing himself, he felt no remorse? At any rate, it was a strange scruple which prevented him playing the hypocrite with God's name, and did not prevent him saying—

“It's only on the stage that women die of love. In the everyday world their hearts are harder, I think. You never heard of a girl dying of love, did you?”

“No,” said Jean, gravely, dropping her eyes before his look and taking up her work.

Before his stay at Eden Braes was over, she had come to listen to him whisper warmer things in her ears. He sounded her with his fine sensitiveness, and watched her love mark higher and higher. Love dawned on Jean like morning sunshine on the river—flickering at first, struggling through mists, and reflecting itself on odd, trembling little accidents of her ways, but gradually lighting her whole life, and gathering up again the heat to itself.

Marg'et Hetherwick was a witness of one meeting between Jean and Frank, down by the old mill on the other side of the river

against Eden Braes. It was through her that I came to know that Frank whispered tender words to a willing Jean. I am constrained to tell you this because of something which happened later. In itself, too, it interests me, as illustrating the rich increase which capital enjoys. Curious ears hear the newest secrets, even as wealthy men are for ever receiving legacies; and if you are conscious of virtue that does not fructify, depend upon it you have buried a napkin somewhere or other.

For her own sake and for the sake of others, perhaps Marg'et's talent would have been as well hidden. To see and hear aright what good fortune had put in her way at the mill, she mounted the rickety staircase to the second storey, and leaned far out of the window over the heads of Jean and the Captain. She being a big woman and the aperture small, her elbow withdrew the support of the window-sash which came down on her shoulders and kept her a listener willy-nilly. By-and-by Jean and Frank moved off. Hour after hour passed,

and the moon rose upon the patient prisoner, who would not for the world have effected her escape by shouting for a stranger's help.

Towards midnight Rab appeared on the path searching for his wife. Marg'et knew the disadvantages of her present case: not the least of them was her inability to gesticulate. It was not often, so to speak, that she was in so tight a place.

"'Takin' yer daunder, Rab?" she called to him, as unconcernedly as she could.

He stopped and looked up. By the light of the moon he read the situation, and was equal to it. Striking an attitude, as nearly as possible in the manner of the strolling Romeos of Ceres Market, he began to play an imaginary guitar—

" The cats like kitchen,
The dogs like broo."

" Haud your wheesht and the bleth'rie o't," panted Marg'et. " An auld man like you skirlin' at this time o' nicht !"

“And an auld wife like you bringing her guidman from his bed,” thought Rab ; but he was gallant, and said—

“Huts ! there ’s nane auld when the heart ’s licht ;” and continued his quavering song—

“The lassies like the lads weel,
The auld wives, too.”

“Rab,” cried Marg’et, not able to restrain her tears, “I wish ye wud come and lift this windy aff my shouthers.”

“The windy !” said Rab, in feigned surprise. “Are ye jammed wi’ the windy ? Deary me ! you nicht ha’ said that at first.”

He mounted the trap singing “I ’m a silly auld body.”

The next day Marg’et said to him, casually, “D’ ye ken wha I saw ae nicht—oh, maybe a week syne ?”

Rab did not know.

“Miss Jean and that Captain. He ’s ower lassie-like a sodger, to my thinkin’ ; but there ’s no mistakin’ she ’s fond o’ him.”

CHAPTER XI.

THAT was the reason (who can doubt it?) why Jean rode out between the hedgerows of a morning more joyfully than ever, and why it was remarked by all that her smile was readier, her face sunnier, her courage stronger, than ever they had been before. Love was a new emotion to the simple Jean. She did not proclaim to all the world that she had found it, as no maiden should. Nor did she take it to pieces, or question her right to enjoy it, or hug it as if it were dearer because she might question her right to it. That is how some story-tellers of to-day would have their heroines behave. I am no story-teller. I am narrating what actually happened, although I never knew Jean Oliphant. Under her northern sun she grew up into a straight and comely lass ; and,

when the time was fulfilled, her love also ripened, as healthy and strong as she herself. That was what brought the smiles to her sunny face, and made her more than ever a toast among the lads for miles around.

By-and-by the lads told of two beauties in Eden Braes instead of one. If ever there were two happy girls under one roof, it was when Margrédel paid her long-promised visit to Jean. To Margrédel, who had never slept a night out of that High Street attic, whose mind was stored from books, the woods round Eden Braes, the river with its reedy bends where the otter builds, and all the summer sights and sounds, were the cause of great joy.

“You may laugh, Jean,” she said ; and Jean did laugh often at her excitement—as when, for example, the rabbits nearly tripped them as they skirted the woods, or the herons floated over the high tree-tops near Kemback. “You may laugh, Jean ; but these things cause me to be so happy that I could make a poetry and sing aloud.”

And she sang among the woods very often.

“There’s something in here,” she continued, putting her hand to her breast, “which would sing out if it could only find the words ; but it cannot.”

Nature did not touch Jean in this way ; nor, if it had touched her so, could she have spoken of it as Margrédél spoke. As her friend chattered about all the things around them, Jean kept saying to herself, “What a strange and dear being this French girl is !”

The same thought passed through her mind the first time she took Margrédél to see Kemback Kirk, leading her by the path she and Frank Hill had ridden up some weeks before. Margrédél had met the Captain more than once already at Eden Braes. It would be wrong to suppose that, from what passed between Jean and him, she could have told they were on specially intimate terms. Love is not a clod, however, and its stammering tongue and tell-tale eyelid are eloquent to a sister woman.

The unaccustomed climb made Margrédél

breathless, and any little voice which she had left was used to express her wonder at a new sensation. Her thoughts were busy, however, when Jean, whose words came as easily as if she sat in the arbour in Eden Braes garden, pointed out where the Captain had fallen, and where Rab Hetherwick had startled her on the brow of the hill. Margrédel had the artistic habit, and she loved romance ; and then, too, she loved Jean very dearly.

When they came in sight of the kirk, Margrédel was speechless at the wonderful beauty of the scene. Jean had always thought it a pretty spot, and had told her friends so when she brought them to see it. It was lovelier in her eyes now because of tender associations ; but these associations were her very own, and could enhance the beauty of the place to no one but herself. Yet here was Margrédel speechless—more affected, evidently, than Jean, with her reserved nature, would have cared to be.

“ Captain Hill was like you, Margrédel.

He was struck with the loveliness of the place," Jean said, breaking the silence at last.

"Have you any friends buried here?" Margrédel said.

Jean thought it a strange question, but she answered it.

"My uncle's grave—my mother's uncle at least—is in the corner under the ivy yonder."

"What a lovely place to be buried in!" Margrédel said. Then she turned.

"Do you know, Jean, I shall be jealous of the Captain Hill."

Jean grew rosy.

"Oh! I'm so glad, Jean," Margrédel said again, impulsively linking her arm in Jean's.

They skipped down the path and along the river-bank, making the summer air the richer for their laughter, like two merry school-girls.

So the happy days passed.

The happiest hours in them, perhaps, were

spent with Jean's mother. Margrédel's impulsive heart worshipped the grey-haired invalid, whose face in repose she used to watch, conjuring up, after her artistic habit, the experiences which she thought she saw written on her brow. Mrs. Oliphant did not say much. She had learned to possess her soul in silence. But she had ready words of kindness for her daughter's friend, and her high spirits shook a wing at times; so that Douglas, passing her window one balmy afternoon, thought it was the happiest, loveliest trio of women who sat and sewed by it.

The reader will already have guessed why the sight awakened painful thoughts within Douglas's breast: nay, not awakened—intensified, I had rather said.

Months before, his daughter had written home to him from Kirkcaldy, "I have made a very dear friend—Margrédel English;" and her words carried his mind back to long-buried days of adventure and riot. Then came further tales—of her beauty, of her like-

ness to Jean, of her unknown parentage. He would fain have ridden down to Kirkcaldy to catch a glimpse of this Margrédél. When Jean spoke of bringing her to Eden Braes, his soul arose in revolt against the thought ; yet in his doubt and fear he said nothing, but tried to steel his heart, and wait for the thunderbolt if it should fall. But the sight of his wife, tied to her chair, drew pity to his eyes. There she sat, all unconscious of the danger that hung over her ; and, for the first time in his life, the idea of his family's curse harassed his soul.

No wonder, then, that it pained him see his wife and daughter and Margrédél seated in such happy converse beneath his roof, or that Mrs. Oliphant wrung his heart with anguish when she called to him—

“Dug ! I am happy to-day with two daughters instead of one.”

The words, whose effects he turned aside to hide, drew the women closer. Margrédél could not help kissing her for their kindness,

and owning their value to her orphaned heart, while Jean and her mother comforted her with the promise of their love.

Douglas had to hear from his wife's lips the recital of Margrédel's story, which shut the door against any hope that was left him. Worse still to bear were the frank looks and words of the girl herself.

But not only did Margrédel by her visit to Eden Braes make a family of friends. I have told you that she was beautiful, and have not thought it worth while telling you that she knew it. Is woman, whom God has armed at all points with a sensitiveness for what has beauty, to be blind to her own? And when does she realize it fully except when she feels its power? If you could have heard the conversations the two girls held when they retired to their rooms of a night, you would not have doubted that Margrédel had learned the power of her beauty to turn the heads of the Eden-side youths. Do not think she was a flirt. One person of Margrédel's day fell into that

error, as you shall hear, and it had disastrous consequences. I feel it weighing upon me like a burden that those who hear the story from me shall not be numbered among her accusers. Think rather of this bright and passionate girl as of a bird that had been caged, not pining for the wider air which it had never known, yet thrilled at times with the instincts of freedom. Shall not such a bird revel in the sunshine when at length it spreads its wings? I have told you how Margrédel skipped and sang in the woods in the mad intoxication of youth when it opens its heart to Nature. Nature did not misunderstand her. But it would have been strange had no man or woman, too dull or too soiled with the world, misunderstood this freshness of the opening day, and done it wrong. Her very foreign accent, slight as it was, and her occasional slips in idiom, added to the danger, by creating claims to confidences that were not safe with dishonest men. Do not blame Margrédel if it fell out so.

The time to go fishing on the Eden is at darkening. Rab Hetherwick, who could busk a fly and crack a joke with any man, would have told you so; and had he met Captain Frank Hill on the lower runs at twilight, he might as likely as not have said to him—with his Marg'et's story in his mind's eye—that night-fishing had its advantages in the specially big fish it brought to the creel.

“You have two strings to your bow,” some one twitted Frank, borrowing from another sport; and Frank acknowledged the fact readily enough, quoting from an old author the opinion that “to fly well with one wing, to run fast with one leg, were rather rare masteries than sure examples.” That was Frank Hill all over. But that was before the two-stringed metaphor had gained truth in its application by Margrédel's appearance at Eden Braes. He would not have relished Rab's joke on one particular night, when he left a company of officers and farmers and went down the river with his rod.

"There's always a Naiad of the stream Frank fishes," one said, as soon as the door has closed upon the Captain.

"As who should say," another added, "there's mony ane maks an errand to the ha' to bid my lady gude-day."

"Frank overdoes it," the first speaker went on. "You'll neither catch Eden trout nor Eden women if you show yourself at the end of the rod."

"No fear of that. Frank can pick his lane. It's the brightest fly takes in the dark," a third broke in.

"I think you've run that figure to ground," said the old fox-hunter in the corner, not deigning to take his pipe from his mouth. "The whole pack of you are jealous of Hill's success."

"He has to thank his horse and his collar-bone for that," growled a youngster in reply.

The others laughed, while the elder man looked contemptuous.

"Well, well," he said: "better you all

recognise it now. I mind"—he turned to the last speaker—"I mind, when you were n't done with the rattle, we did n't notice a bonny peach in that same Eden Braes till a stranger came and plucked it. Then we began to mix her name with our wine. It was 'bonny Mistress Jean' in those days, too,—poor woman!"

"Poor? why poor?" one or two officers queried.

The youngster had his revenge.

"Don't you see? the peach missed our friend's cleaner mouth. He would bite after no man."

The fox-hunter flushed annoyance, for he had been notorious in his day for straying afield. But one opportunely said—

"By the way, what about the French girl that outshines your bonny Jean?" and the private bicker was merged in the larger question of Jean and Margrédel, and their respective merits.

The soldiers were all for Margrédel, but the

country-side was loyal. Jack Elder focussed the discussion after his own elegant fashion when he said—

“It’s about ixey-pixey. The French girl’s gotten the features; Jean’s a ‘strapper’—she is.”

The judgment satisfied the audience. They had all seen Jean upon a horse, and Margrédél’s champions had to own to the wonder of that sight. In order to strengthen their position they must needs retail much of Margrédél’s choicest repartee; and so, you may be sure, the night passed in a highly intellectual manner.

Meanwhile Frank was plying his rod towards Eden Braes. He was given, perhaps, to fishing for nymphs as well as for trout; but, to do him justice, he enjoyed both sports.

Over against Eden Braes, at the old mill, is a nice run, a pretty certain place to the man who can stand well back and throw a long line. At Frank’s second cast there was a silver sparkle as a fish darted to the surface. The next should hook him. But, alas! his

line had caught something behind him, and he turned, with a hasty word in tune with her little scream, to find that he had hooked Margrédel.

"A bigger fish than you bargained for," she cried merrily, being pleased to recognise her captor.

"With a lot of play in it," he said to himself. "Oh those dark eyes!"

"Shall I unhook it? or shall I cut it?" He put his hand in his pocket for his knife.

"Nay, unhook it."

He had not to bend to her shoulder. He drank an intoxicating draught from those eyes that looked straight into his.

"Mr. Oliphant and Willy are coming from Cupar. Did you meet them? I may have missed them, or they may have come by the road," she said, but not chiefly to explain her presence there; for she added, "But Jean's in. Will you come up to the house?"

She blushed with the pleasure of being a confidante of her friend's lover.

"So she takes that for granted," was the thought that flashed through Frank's mind, and irritated him.

"Will you hold my rod?" he said. "It will be easier to unhook."

"And kiss the dog that chastened me," she replied, innocent of any wrong except a little pride in the smartness of her conversations, which Frank had flattered.

He looked into her eyes, stopping in his task to do so. Where was his fine taste? I tell you, fine taste in a man is not a moral quality.

There was a world of revelation in the look, and the blood leapt in her veins.

He replied to her first question.

"I'd rather stay with you," he said.

The words brought her to her senses. He saw his mistake, and could have bit his tongue off.

"Cut it," she said.

"Are you angry, Margrédel?"

"Cut it," she repeated.

Just then there was a rustling of the bushes,

as if some one were on the path. He remembered that Douglas and Willy were expected that way, and opened his knife slowly so as to give him time. The rustling, whosoever caused it, died away.

"It cuts our friendship," he said slowly.

She was not mollified : that meant that she was not to be deceived. He was as well pleased that it was so. His passion, like his temper, was mercurial ; but it had found bottom for the nonce, else he would have feared the imperious girl.

"Margrédel," he said ; and the passion in his voice set vibrating in her a chord whose existence she had not dreamed of. There is a saving cherub, they say, which sits on a lofty perch within us. It can be tickled into blindness.

She stood silent, erect, looking straight in front of her, passive as the grey-green bank that stretched at their feet, erect as the tall dim tree-trunks. She was conscious of his words in her ear—to her as little full of meaning as

the babbling of the river there, yet deadening the throbs of her heart like the stroking of an aching nerve.

It seemed minutes. For as many seconds only had his words smote her ear. Never mind what they implied. Passion is true, and his were passionate words, inspired by those rich red lips that hung on the moist surface of her face like holly-berries on the dewy leaves at even.

She watched the dancing reflections of the young moon under the white willows. One, two, three—a hundred, she counted, and his voice in her ear.

Into his passion's tale began to enter reason. She believed he loved another. He had believed it once himself. But now she was his all in all, his love, his Margrédel. "As for Jean——"

At the word the sluice-gates were opened. Her past, Jean's friendship, Jean's happy tell-tale face of love, her trust, that look of his a minute ago—up they all welled against the

dyke that sense had reared for a second, and overflowed. By day, I suppose a look might have expressed her contempt, her loathing, and earnest abhorrence. In the darkness came words, English and French indiscriminately, as they served their turn to lacerate him. Then she was gone, past him, under the willow, drowning the reflected moon with her shadow as new knowledge had drowned her innocence, across the bridge that led to Eden Braes, leaving on the other side the river the freshness of her girlhood. Frank noted it all as he passed down the riverside path. He passed from our history to war, and bivouac, and the homes of men and women, and his own home ; and with him went, seared on his inmost heart, the figure, the shadow, the words of Margrédel.

CHAPTER XII.

IT is lucky for the poor devil with a story to tell that he has a "Hey! presto!" that can wing leaden heels. "Hey! presto!" then: and in less time than is allowed us to blot out day in night and the young moon in Margrédel's shadow, we fly backwards in time and seawards in space to the narrow house next the old High Street mansion. A few deft passes of the magic wand in the hand of the true magician, and dry bones may live. Shall we venture?

Begin with the parts of lead; the gold should be found later. Feet in immaculate leather, like all French feet; long, straight limbs; shoulders which seem to have started on life with a knapsack which gravity drew

to its centre, and was now sunk into the shoulder-blades to bend them ; a moustache which would look *militaire* but for the beard beneath it—both grizzled in life's service ; a long nose, with round open nostrils which make the eyes look small : the eyes themselves are keen, yet should be happy but for the inward reflection of care. Ah ! the weight between the Professor's shoulder-blades is a load on the heart—the half of Margrédel's history. Think of the other half which Douglas knows—our story. If these two come together they will coalesce—that is climax—with such friction and flame as is in the nature of the elements. For such a combination you must prepare yourself.

Thrift Hetherwick, out in the garden pulling a dish of radishes for her master's breakfast, sees at the half-open window of the Professor's house a plate or two and a cup, and the Professor himself bent near them. "Coffee," she said to herself, with true housewife's instinct guessing the beverage her

neighbour loved. Then her fingers itched to get at the cups; for Thrift had not much faith in what men can do, even an old soldier: less faith than most women, because of her Snooks experience—for had not Snooks obeyed her mother? Wull had Thrift's reflections served up with the radishes for breakfast. If you have not forgotten Marjory altogether, you will recall her habit of deploying. Thrift preferred to take the position with a rush.

As she waited on him, she wished to know if Wull could wash dishes? He thought he could. Thrift snuffed the air—once, to show her contempt of the result, and a second time at man's inherent vanity. She got nearer the raw by asking him if he would like to have the neighbours see him at it. I suppose it must be nearer the raw, for I have known men who cooked their food and did their own washing in the bush, yet raised their eyes, when they returned to civilization, on a man who brushed his own boots.

"What the devil are you driving at?" Wull exclaimed, thereby showing that she had him.

"Just this, Maister William, that that Frenchman washes his—as I seed mysel' this morning. That comes o' Margrédel galavanting to Eden Braes. And as it's us," ("us," remark you) "that's taken her there, the least we could do would be to offer him a hand."

"I?" said Wull, irritatingly. "Was that why you asked me if I could wash?"

"Me? Ye ken fine," she said.

"I ken you and him's great friends."

He referred to certain passages between the Professor and Thrift, on the subject of mutual washing-houses, and suchlike.

"A dorty deevil," she said, with a toss of her head. "Banged his window when he saw me looking at him."

Wull gave a deprecatory shrug to his shoulders. The Professor was an occasional guest of the house now.

"And then, you see," he said, "if he did n't like you to look at him, how would he relish your offer to——?"

"Oh! he was maybe goin' to shut the window ony way, ye ken," she explained.

"Ah, Thrift, Thrift, you are your father's daughter in the use of that polish wherewith he adorns his tales," Wull said, smiling. "Still, in any case, you could only hurt his feelings by speaking to 'm."

"Ye canna tak' the breeks aff a Hielant-man," snapped up Thrift. It was an impolite and forcible expression of her skepticism at "furrin fowk" having feelings to hurt. "It's no' him," she proceeded. "But he's Margrédel's uncle — reputit — and Jean's freend. It was the lassie I wis thinkin' o'."

"If the lassie's like most women, she might resent the interference. It might hurt her feelings, too. That is, if she has any. She's French too, of course?"

"Of course?" said Thrift. "Then ye ken mair nor maist fowk."

"You might do Monsieur Malbert a greater service than washing his breakfast dishes if ye kept his name and reputation cleaner," Wull said sternly, and sent Thrift away sorrowful; for Thrift had a large circle of acquaintance.

The morning's conversation bore fruit in the afternoon, however, inasmuch as Wull, remembering it when he chanced to meet the grizzled old teacher, thought it would only be neighbourly to ask him to dine.

He felt lonely now with the nights creeping in a bit, he said to the Professor. Did not Mr. Malbert feel so too, with Margrédél away? By the way, had he heard from her? It was strange how we miss young faces. And wouldn't he come in and have dinner with him, and a throw of the dice after it? He would consider it a charity if he did so, Wull assured him.

After dinner had mellowed his guest somewhat, Wull said that he must come often while his niece was away; and the old port—Doug-

las's port, a special brand—was eloquent with the same invitation.

"*Vin d'Oporto. Bien!*" Monsieur said.

"1813. The year of Leipzig," his host replied. "I remember it because my brother sailed away in that year."

"And I," replied the other, and pulled up his sleeve, showing the cicatrix over an old sabre-wound.

"An honourable wound," said Wull, bowing over his wine. "We drink to continued peace."

But the Professor put down his glass.

"Honourable!" he said excitedly. "Eye to eye, sword to sword, you kill me, I kill you. Yes. I had him through the body for that," he added grimly, pointing to the scar. "But to give up the sword in the enemy's country, to eat his meat and drink his wine, and all the time the stab—here," laying his hand on his heart. "*Infamie!*"

Wull thought he referred to his Penicuik days, and said, "My brother shared your fate

—not in battle, but on the sea—and France gave him bread and wine. So the account's squared. He had nothing but good words for your country when he came home at last."

"And those at home?" asked the Professor.

"They lived to welcome him?"

An angry flush streaked Wull's cheek.

"You have heard the story?" he said stiffly.

Monsieur shook his head.

"His father—my father died the day he returned."

"In his arms?" said Monsieur.

"In his arms," replied Wull, uneasily.

"Call you that squaring the accounts? I too left behind me—a father? Thank God, no. A sister. I see her sunny face under the pear-trees, and the blue and velvet cap and the kerchief I gave her on her holiday. She lived in my heart all the weary days at Penicuik. I return. Bah! Why do I speak of it? I never see her more; but she lives here," laying his hand on his heart. "When I die," he went on slowly, "they will lay me with my

comrades across the Firth at Valley-field. It will be French soil at least. I wish this had been the end," rolling his sleeve down over his scar.

"Margrédel," said Wull, softly.

"Ten thousand devils ! What do you know of Margrédel ?" cried the Professor, jumping with keen, angry, scared eyes to his feet.

"You must n't speak so when you've got Margrédel," Wull said ; for he guessed the story now, or something of it.

"Ah ! yes ! Margrédel," the Professor said in a subdued voice, and sat long in silence.

A fuller revelation of the Frenchman came to Wull a few evenings later. The Professor had come in unbidden, and began to talk of Jean and Margrédel. He spoke, too, of Douglas ; and Wull produced the dice-board, and with an inward smile the *vin d' Oporto*. Game after game they played, and nothing was heard during them save the two men's voices quoting the throws they made so merrily, and the clatter of the pieces as they arranged them. And

as they set the board afresh between the games, they sipped their wine as if life had no greater problems in store for them than those which the dice should present.

By-and-by the Professor, in his excitement, dropped one of his men, which rolled to the fireplace. He got down on his knees to find it. What did he see, while down there, that he should rise with such a face? It was ashy white. His nostrils quivered, and the little eyes shone with a look of fear and craft and triumph.

"It is nothing; it will pass," he said, in reply to the other's anxious looks.

All the while he was itching to be upon his knees again, and his brain was busy for an excuse to get his host from the room.

"A little water," he said. But as Wull was going to ring for it, "Never mind," he added. "Fresh air—I will go. But, meanwhile, I was to have asked you for a book, a copy of 'Hamlet,' which Margrédel had. I wish to see it. A passage I would remember."

It was not in the room, and to find it Wull Oliphant had to leave the Professor. Before the door was shut upon him, Monsieur Malbert had kicked the dull embers into a glow, and bent towards them. The fresh flame lit up the old mantelpiece.

“*Sacré!*” He had not been mistaken. *Margrédel Malbert*. In ragged letters his sister’s name was cut on the under side of the low mantelshelf, throwing up the letters before his excited eyes. That sister’s face as he had remembered it through long years was before him. Was it to be revenged at last? Were the waking dreams of half a lifetime now to be fulfilled? When? Here in the house whose meat and drink he partook of. He rose to his feet and dashed his wine-glass into the flame. His head was in a swirl. There were footsteps in the room above. They roused him. He stooped to see the name again. His wine had drowned the flame, and it was dark under the shelf; but he could feel the letters. He was on his knees, his long thin fingers impressed upon them.

And there on his knees he prayed for revenge. How little did Douglas Oliphant dream when, in an idle hour eighteen years ago, he cut an old love's name upon his mantelshelf, that it should rise up a record against him and his !

When Wull returned, Monsieur Malbert was on the floor in front of the fire. Wull raised him to his feet, and tried to persuade him to remain under his roof for the night. Monsieur would not hear of it. He staggered to the lobby, and his host assisted him down the stair, without a word. At that dark bend Wull's mind went to Douglas and Eden Braes and Margrédel.

"Would n't you be better to have Margrédel with you?" he said, looking at the tottering figure at his side.

Margrédel ! The Professor had n't thought of that ; and it flashed a new horror through him to think of her living under an Oliphant's roof.

"Yes," he cried. "How can it be done?"

"They might post," Willy said.

"I will go for her," the other said.

"You!" cried Willy, and he believed now that his companion's head was turned. He calmed him, and persuaded him that he must wait till morning. So they issued on the street, and walked to the Professor's door.

There Wull bid him good-night. The Professor drew himself up.

"I have to thank you for your courtesy," he said. "You—your family are the only persons who have been kind to us in our exile. O God, that it should have been you!" he burst out, burying his face in his hands. Wull would have spoken, but the Professor waved him off. "Leave me," he said, and there was no gain-saying. Wull turned to his own door. He stood on the narrow pavement, fearful lest Monsieur should be seized afresh, but he heard his neighbour's door shut. He was left alone in the street, where the cold night-air was creeping up the wynds from the sea.

CHAPTER XIII.

WE left Margrédel flying from Jean's disloyal lover. When she reached Eden Braes she found Marg'et Hetherwick very voluble in the hall.

Rab had been to Kirkcaldy during the day, which was that following the Professor's discovery, and had made a new acquaintance. He was accosted in the High Street (as he explained to Marg'et on his return) by a gentleman, who asked him if he were the carrier who called at Eden Braes ; for, if so, he wished him to carry a letter to Miss Margrédel English there.

Marg'et scented a piece of gallantry at once, and said " Sweetheart."

" Maybe," replied Rab, coolly ; " at any rate—to explain to you—I speered at him, Was he

the leddy's faither? Then he telt me his name was Mounseer Malbert, her uncle. Mounseer," he went on—being on the top of his cart, and therefore able to afford to add fuel to Marg'et's indignation—"Mounseer is the French for Maister—a thing an ignorant woman like you's no' expec'ed to know. He's a silly body to be an auld sodger, as they tell me. There wouldna be much left o' him if some o' oor lads cam' to grips with him. The resurrectionists wouldna gie ae copeck for his body. But he has an e'e like a hawk. When I speered at 'm, Was he the leddy's faither? he looked me straight atween the e'en till I felt to mysel', 'He may be a puir body, Rab, my man, but he's got at your moral vitals onyway.'"

"Ay, man. Is he a merrit man?" Marg'et asked.

"That was a topic we didna touch on, like," her good man replied, slowly, cocking the eye farthest from Marg'et till his whole face was screwed, "else we micht ha' drawn better; for it's brithers in infirmity the text speaks o'."

Marg'et was retreating towards her door before she answered, so that she might claim the last word. But Rab continued—

“ Pit on yer shawl, Marg'et, 'oman, an' tak' the letter up to the Hoose.” Business was business with both the honest carrier and his wife, and their bickerings were indeed in the nature of a luxury. Marg'et discarded her well-worn stratagem and returned for the letter.

“ It 's mighty partic',” Rab said, as he handed it to her, “ and 's to be gien to Miss Margrédel—personally.”

So Marg'et wrapped herself in her shawl, and wended her way along the river-bank towards Eden Braes. But hearing voices near the old mill, she struck in among the bushes, unable to resist the temptation to pry. She recognised the figure of the Captain, and, in the waning light, mistook Margrédel for Jean, and with a human chuckle made for the house.

“ Miss Margrédel is out,” the servant said in reply to her inquiries, but she invited her into

the hall, where, indeed, Marg'et, from privileged custom, would have gone unbidden. "And I'll ask Miss Jean to speak to you," the servant added.

"Ye needna fash. It's mighty partic' private business," said Marg'et, using Rab's word to express her own self-importance. "What's mair, I 'm thinkin' Miss Jean's better occipied," she added, with a knowing look that might prelude further information.

This was checked, however, by Jean's appearance.

"Oh! it's you, Marg'et?" she said. "I thought it was Margrédél returned."

Marg'et was dumfounded. You could have knocked her down with your little finger, as she told Rab afterwards.

"Did I no' pass you at the waterside i' noo?" she cried.

"You certainly did not, Marg'et," said Jean. "I've been with mother all night." Marg'et was in doubt whether to disbelieve her eyes or Jean's word.

"Would it not be Margrédel you saw?"

Jean then said.

Marg'et gasped.

"We are considered like one another."

Marg'et knew it, and knew now that it was Margrédel whom she had seen. The inquisitive old woman could see as far through a stone wall as most folks : the meaning of Margrédel being in Jean's place beside the Captain flashed through her mind clearly enough. And when there was a step on the gravel outside and Margrédel entered, was it unnatural that the loyal old woman, whose life had been spent near Eden Braes, whose daughter had nursed Jean as she herself had nursed Jean's mother, should feel the springs of hate welling up within her against the foreign beauty?

Margrédel's large eyes glowed like coals. She looked a little surprised at the group in the hall. Perhaps unconsciously she read enmity in Marg'et's face. At any rate, she marched to where Jean stood. Jean took her arm and leant her head upon her

shoulder, not knowing why she loved her friend so.

"Here's Marg'et passed you on the road," she said, "and mistook you for me."

Marg'et interpreted the glint of fire in Margrédel's eye, the suppressed quiver of her lip, as terror of discovery, and more and more longed to crush her.

"I cam' wi' a message for you," she said, eyeing her fiercely.

"What is it?" Margrédel said calmly, recognising an enemy now. Her heart was beating.

"From Kirkcaldy."

A low cry burst from Margrédel's lips. "Uncle!"

"Ay. Your uncle gave it to my man himsel'."

"Ah!" Margrédel gave a sigh of relief. Her uncle himself gave it to Rab. "What is it, then?"

"It's private," Marg'et said dourly.

"Oh," Jean said, "I will leave you." Margrédel tightened her arm, but Jean with-

drew hers, whispering, "There's nothing wrong. It's her way; humour her;" and crying a "Good-night, Marg'et," went upstairs.

"What message have you for me? What is it you wish with me?" Margrédel asked, going straight to the heart of Marg'et's conduct.

They were two dauntless women who stood face to face in the hall of Eden Braes, and in other circumstances they would have respected each other. But loyalty to Jean blinded the eyes of one of them, while the other's heart was filled with its own bitterness.

"It's a letter to you," Marg'et said, handing it to her. In face of the girl's courage, she refused, for a second, the proffered battle.

Margrédel broke the seal, saying, "Have you no verbal message, then?" and read her uncle's request that she should come home at once, as he had not been well.

Such news could not startle her to-night. She rather rejoiced that such a command should have arrived now, to take her from Eden Braes.

"Have you no further message? Is this all?"

"It's high time you were back at Kirk-caldy."

"Why! why!" cried Margrédel, thinking of her uncle again. But when she said, "I am going back to-morrow. My uncle bids me," a look in Marg'et's face checked her fears about her uncle, and forced her back to her own battle. "How do you speak in this way to me?" she said, with the old set face.

Margrédel's heat reacted on Marg'et's temper.

"Maybe I shouldna, but there's them that should—and wull, my lady. D' ye think I didna see ye the nicht? D' ye think I didna ken wha ye were wi' at auld Eden's mill? Does she ken? D' ye tell Miss Jean wha's company it is ye leave hers for? And ye ha'e the face to tak' her airm here—hers, the simple lassie; hers, under her ain roof whaur you're bidin', and a' the time stealin' her sweetheart from her!"

Margrédel had not yet separated herself

from the awful wrong Frank Hill had done to Jean. It was Jean with her love, her simplicity, that she had thought of, and Marg'et's words stung her. But they stung her also to a new sense of the wrong done to herself. Marg'et represented the world and its calumny.

"Stop! It is not true. Oh! believe me, it is not true. Oh! why should I have to listen to all this!"

"Margrédel! My dear Margrédel!" Jean's voice could be heard on the stair.

Not a tear had wet Margrédel's cheek as she paced the garden after she fled from Frank. She had tried to still her beating heart. At the thought of her being mistaken for Jean, her lip had quivered with the pity of it that Jean should not have held her place under the mill. With Jean's words in her ears, and her arm around her, Margrédel's proud heart overflowed.

"Oh, Jean! Jean!" she cried. "Speak to her. Send her away."

"She's deceivin' ye, miss," Marg'et said stolidly. "She's not to be lipped to."

Jean felt the wild sobs in her arms. She felt Margrédel clasp her tighter, as if she would say, "Do not believe her. I have you that love me, at least."

"Go away home, Marg'et Hetherwick," Jean said.

"I'm tellin' ye, miss," the old woman interrupted, "I saw her with Captain——"

Once more the clasp grew tighter.

"Go!" cried Jean; "I will not listen. Not another word. How dare you treat my friend so?"

"Come, Margrédel," she went on, gently. "Come to my room, dearest; and without further word she led off Margrédel, and left Marg'et to find her way out herself.

Can you wonder that Marg'et went out to Kemback in revolt against Jean, for whose sake she hated Margrédel; or that she painted the French girl's conduct black as night when she told Rab all that she had seen and heard?

“The hussey daured me,” she said, “and denied what my ain e’en saw. And Miss Jean cam’, who’s as nateral as a peat, and took her awa’.”

I cannot blame Marg’et, pity as I may, the two girls who, even as she spoke, were opening their hearts, with all their sorrows, to each other. Men find the road of duty lying over their neighbours’ hearts: that is the way the world is made.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next forenoon saw Margrédel take her seat in the mail-coach among a mixed company on its way to the ferry at Pettycur. She sat, unheedful of her neighbours, with a hard, fixed look, such as any traveller wears in our fast day, when it is a robbery of time even to feel the wind on one's face ; but it seemed so strange in a mail-coach, especially in a face so fair and young, that there were few who did not remark it. One passenger at least, with some down upon his chin, thought he should have liked to meet face to face with the man who caused her heaviness of heart. Doubtless the fresh horses carried other heavy hearts as well as Margrédel's ; but he failed to observe them. Howsoever things may change in fifty

years, the habit is like to last out time of young knights reading most need of a champion in pretty faces.

Behind the hard eyes, Margrédel was conning the Professor's message, wondering that he should have written it if he could come out to the street to deliver it to Rab, yet unable to think of any cause for his sending it, save that he required her by reason of illness. From that her mind went back over many eccentricities of her uncle, and strange conduct of his in the past, with the forebodings it bred ; and all this kept the memory of the last night's emotions from overwhelming her, although it gave tone to her thoughts, even as the ground colour of our canvas comes up through what we paint upon it. And as not even the recuperative power of Margrédel's own land of France is stronger than that of youth and health, she was not within the sight of the sea when the sunshine, and the smell of leaves from under the hedgerows, and the joy of motion, drove away her cares, and she grew curious in the

villages they passed through, and, while she talked but little, smiled at the small jokes which, as well as the wittiest, whiled away the road for the travellers. For Margrédel could not become heavy-hearted all at once, any more than the crafty look could have come in a day into the eyes of the Professor, who was awaiting her in front of the National Inn. Yet that day that look was very strong in his eyes: it is strange how, of a sudden, you notice fingers grown crooked with constant handling of guineas, or cheeks pinched by long company with poverty.

Of course Margrédel was too delighted to see him to notice this look, which was patent to others. As soon as the coach jolted over the rough causeway, she was conscious of a feeling of new happiness at the thought of being home again. The sight of her uncle relieved her mind of its little fears; and whereas hitherto she had always thought of him and of herself as exiles in this grey street, her heart now went out to the ragamuffins who

surrounded the coach, and to the shopkeepers in their doorways, as to friends and neighbours. That showed how deep had been the experience of the past twenty-four hours, for she could never have felt so towards Kirkcaldy and Kirkcaldy folks had not the dip into the world outside been so disastrous.

When he had helped her to alight, he kissed her, and the onlookers shrugged their shoulders. They were unaccustomed to kiss on the street or to shake hands even, except one should so salute another in the market for sport or mockery. Then she noticed his paleness ; and he said, still holding her in his arms and looking into her face, as if they had been alone in the house (only then he might have said it in French)—

“ And you’re as brown as a berry, Margrédel.”

Quite relieved, she walked to the house on his arm. She had been living where all men’s skins were brown from days in the sun and in the fields ; and in her eyes, made familiar with

their ruddiness, her uncle looked no paler than the shopkeepers, although they were in their white aprons, and were out in the street, sun or no sun, all day long, and would have left their counters to mark the arrival of a pack-man. These pale-faced gentlemen, being in their aprons, touched their forelock to their children's teacher, as became tradesmen, and said, by-and-by, that the Professor's wench was handsome ; while the women told one another that she had returned from Eden Braes, and that they " could n't fathom her ever having been there, no more they could," which was true. If it had been possible they should have fathomed it long ago, for this was not the first time, by many hundreds, that they had discussed the intimacy between the Oliphants and Margrédel.

" I have n't been well," the Professor said ; " but there 's worse than that. Another week would have meant ruin, as you 'll see."

He laughed at her wonderment, and, letting her into the house, led her straight to where a

little heap of broken crockery lay in the kitchen. He did not tell her that in a whirl of passion he had dashed to the ground the table and all that was on it, and that to the coarseness of the household's ware only did he owe it that he had been able to pick up much that was unbroken. But he blamed it all upon his clumsy hands, and said, "I told you it meant ruin; I am no housekeeper," as if he had broken one morning a cup, another morning a plate, piece by piece, during the time she was away. Margrédel, the blood rushing to her face with the thought of her uncle among the dishes each day (it would not have troubled her had she not seen how, in Eden Braes, the men did nothing in the house), cried out—

"Oh, uncle! did I not say how it would be if I went away? I wish I had not gone. You have had no comfort with me from home."

Yet she could not but laugh at the comical face he made, like a naughty boy, as if he were winking to himself and not looking slyer than usual.

"But I have been ill," he replied. "I should not have been, had I stuck to my own plain fare; but I dined with Mr. Oliphant often, and drank his wine."

He did not allow his voice to falter as he spoke of this.

Margrédel said, "Then you would have been very ill if you had been with me;" whereupon his eye became brighter again, and he had a thousand questions to ask about Eden Braes, and the doings there, and especially concerning Douglas.

To understand aright what it cost Robert Malbert to listen to Margrédel's talk about Dug Oliphant, or how bitter for him was the kindness of her mention of him, we must think what he had suffered. As he had told Wull, it was his sister Margrédel's memory that had cheered him throughout the wars and in his imprisonment. When he returned to his home at length, it was to find it desolate. His sister had gone as a nurse to the neighbouring garrison town. But she was

dead—dead of shame and of a broken heart—and had left behind her this child, whom the neighbours kept and called Margrédel. That, with the story of a handsome Englishman, was all : the villagers had had more to think of, building up their broken walls, and recalling the memories of their own dead, than his name or his route.

In a torrent of shame Robert Malbert had crossed the sea with the little Margrédel. In the land of his exile, somewhere, he would find means of living away from hateful memories. The sun, as he sailed up the Firth of Forth, lay on the roofs of Kirkcaldy, and the town looked like a gold band round the bay, set with jewels where the windmills struck sparks out of the sunlight. Leaning over the bulwarks at his side was an old skipper, who without turning his eyes pointed a finger in the direction of the town.

“That ’s my toon,” he said, “an’ I ’m gaun back to’t a hantle sicht puirer than I left it.”

Now that his eyes were directed to it, the Professor thought that the town had an appearance of quiet and peace, with the smoke hanging lazily above it; so there he took Margrédel.

We know the rest: how, as the even years passed, now and then a chance word, like Margrédel's recital of Ophelia's wrong, would rouse the slumbering fury in him; how the child came to be able to set it asleep again. All the time he was hiding their story from the neighbours, then from Margrédel herself. This habit made him crafty, and passion lived long, being covered like a gathered fire, till at length at the discovery of the carving in Margrédel's absence the volcano wakened and burned lurid.

It was Douglas, of whose sailing and story in France Wull had spoken often, that the Professor straightway marked as his enemy. He was not conscious of arguing how it must have been Douglas. It came like an inspiration with the discovery of his sister's

name in the old mansion-house. Burning in his brain was the figure of the dark horseman whom Margrédél had pointed out from the windows as Jean's father ; and he longed to confront him in Eden Braes, in his home, and — When the spasm was past, the Professor's palms were red, with nail-marks in them. He thought of Margrédél, and a calm followed the tempest, until the low moaning of it began again with thoughts of how she should have her rights, and of Eden Braes, and of the mistress of Eden Braes. Why was she there, while his pretty Margrédél slept at the back of the village for ever ? And the other Margrédél ought to be in Jean's shoes, and should be, by the holy Mary, let him once set fingers on this Douglas. His impulse was to ride out at once to Eden Braes. No ! Margrédél was there : and the fury died down, and doubt followed—the doubt if he might not be wrong, if there was proof of Douglas's wickedness. Any one might know his niece as Margrédél Malbert and carve her name. God ! She was as much

Margrédel Malbert as any other name he knew of—Margrédel Malbert as soon as this pitiful Margrédel English, which name he had given her before the neighbours in his early madness, and, for his story's sake, must stick to. But . . . Margrédel Oliphant. He fanned his fury by repeating the name again and again, and swore, looking on the stars from the black, back windows, that he would prove this discovery.

Round and round in this circle had the Professor's feelings worked during the next day and night. The near approach of Margrédel's return found Craft at Passion's throat, keeping the upper hand, although it struggled hard, and got on its feet again, almost, when Margrédel spoke kind words in its ears of the family at Eden Braes.

So the fight lasted through the winter into the lengthening days, when men ceased to speak of the summer that was past, and thought of that which was to come. It was a poor fight to write about, but stern if you had seen how

the knapsack sank deeper between the Professor's shoulders, and how each morning found fresh grey hairs in his head.

Still he learned nothing. He drank with the sailors on the quay, and with the old toppers in the inns, and, drunk or sober, could worm nothing from them about Douglas, except the stories of old dissolute doings about the town. One hope remained. As soon as summer was round he would go to France. He could not go sooner, for he must keep his pupils, for Margrédel's future. He said to himself that it was all for Margrédel's future, and feigned belief that revenge was not tugging at his heart-strings. So Passion took a new tack, and flattered Craft to get the better of it.

During this time Margrédel had one or two letters from Jean, who said nothing of Frank Hill. Margrédel, having been brought up out of the world, wondered if she could have written so if her lover had proved false. Nor, beyond what Jean wrote, did she hear much of Eden Braes. That winter Wull Oliphant

was away in London, where he had bought some ships that required fitting up anew ; and when he returned he was much occupied in public, for reform was greatly talked of, and the town was in a ferment of political feeling.

And oftentimes as she lay abed, thinking of Jean, or of her uncle's new love for the town's company, the Professor was lying longing to be in the old house, and to press his hands and feed his eyes upon the carved letters in the dining-room.

CHAPTER XV.

“**H**ULLO, Margrédel !”

It was in the last days of February, while Margrédel was walking homewards, under Mrs. Birrell's confection-shop, opposite the narrow Kirk Wynd, with its two stone sentries on which the beggars sat, that Margrédel heard her name called aloud. Looking round, she scarce recognised young Willy Oliphant of Eden Braes in the tall youth who, with a smile on his face, was leading his horse towards her. He had grown away from the school-boy in these last months, and was a handsome young man, much like his Uncle Wull in the matter of looks and yellow hair, but perhaps firmer about the mouth, and with a dash of

his mother's fire in his eyes. He wore not a little of a "milord" air, as became an Oliphant on Kirkcaldy streets. Moreover, he looked well in his buckskins and new boots, and it was perhaps because of them that he dismounted daintily, not at all after the manner in which he was used to fling himself from the brown pony.

When he held out his hand to Margrédel, and she pleased him with the surprise in her eyes at the change in him, you had thought every door and window and close-mouth within fifty yards held a curious face—even as, when Thrift crumbled the stale bread on the kitchen-sill, birds came flitting to the tree-boughs in great flights and sat there chattering like women at a well, so that you wondered that the gardens could have hidden them a minute before. To judge from the faces at the windows, they had much to say on what they saw ; only, from the street you could not hear what was spoken—which was a pity.

Beneath the very fine and gallant exterior of the boy now chatting to Margrédel was the veriest hobbledohoy on this side of the Firth. No sooner did his eyes light upon the confection-window, up to which they had often looked wistfully when his uncle's house was a holiday resort, than he must needs sport his new manhood.

"Granny Birrell's, by the Lord Harry!" he said. "You like sugar-rock, Margrédel?"

Margrédel did; and a rather hectoring "Hullo there!" (because of the little boys that were open-mouthed on the causeway) brought from behind her counter, and down the one or two steps, the white-capped, white-haired old priestess of Willy's early temple. Such was the cheapness of the succulent luxury, and the lavishness of our young squire, that I declare he cleared the window-stock, so that so much afternoon sunshine never found its way through the sweetie-shop panes before or since.

When the old body returned with I know

not how many sticks, he waved his hand, with a "For the lady," as if his teeth had never watered where he stood.

But Margrédel laughed outright, and protested.

"Had n't you better ask Rab Hetherwick to call for these?" she said, with gentle irony.

"He'll be doon the morn," Granny said, seeing no farther than a possible loss of a large order.

"Take one. They are yours," Willy said, largely. "I'll carry some for you, and,"—for this did not dispose of the whole purchase yet, and it would never do to recall a penny of what was spent on a lady—miserliness is not original sin,—“give the rest to the children, Mrs. Birrell.”

He spoke as if childhood were for him a far-off reminiscence. So it was. Can anything be farther off than that which has gone for ever? As he led his horse slowly eastwards to her uncle's door, he could see the crown of Mar-

grédel's bonnet under his eyes. He could not have done that in the autumn.

Margrédel's first flush of pleasure at meeting Willy past (for the genuine laddie that he was delighted her like spring sunshine), her thoughts went back to Eden Braes ; and there were many things concerning Jean which she would have liked to know, yet did not care to ask about. Great was her surprise, therefore, when Willy, looking curiously at her, said—

“Do you know, you 've a better colour than Jean has ?”

At Eden Braes they used to make fun of her “town colour,” and would say, “Put out your hand and make yourself at home. You maun grow ruddy in the country ;” and no music had ever sounded kinder to her ears. So she replied to Willy—

“Thanks to Eden Braes and the good friends there.”

But Willy said—

“Have you not heard that Jean 's not well ?”

“What ails her ?”

Willy shook his head.

"Grown pale and soft," he said. "'Taken to sitting in the house,—and that's not like her. It used to be, when I was at school, 'Willy, I'm dying for a gallop;' or 'Come along for a walk to Cage-whins and see the foxes.' Now that I'm about the place all day long, she'll not stir a foot unless she's asked. Even then she's not a mile from home when she turns Vic's head. You see how fat he's getting." He was riding Vic to-day. "I can't make it out—with Jean. It's just since——"

"Since when, Willy?" Margrédel led him on.

"Since—the regiment lifted."

His face was all aglow, and he stood looking shamefacedly at his boots, and tapping them savagely with his whip. Margrédel turned to stroke Vic's glossy side, and kept her back to him. She had had several letters from Jean, but in none of them was there any mention of Frank Hill. She knew that he

had left with his regiment. She wondered at Jean's reticence. Now her heart was full of pity, but of no regret that she had opened Jean's eyes to Frank's baseness. She had been brought up out of the world, not knowing its way of glossing evil.

"It's stupid," Willy was saying—"devilish stupid."

"What is?" she asked sharply.

"Sitting moping there like, like——" He could not explain how different his Jean ought to be from ordinary girls. "There's lots of as good men about the doors," he said, the uncombed masculinity coming out, now that the subject was broached.

"There's none worse," said Margrédel, breathing hard. Hobbledehoys discountenance strong statements, saving their own—most of all, those made by women. Willy had seen little of Frank Hill, and the little was not much to his taste. It was in what Rab would have called a spirit of "contermashishness" that he said—

"Now, I always found him a good fellow."

"Who?" Margrédel turned upon him a face that checked him.

"It's Frank Hill you were talking of?" he said.

"I tell ye what it is," she said vehemently ;
"if you thought that, you would n't be your father's son. If I thought you thought it, I would n't speak to you another word."

It was clear to those at the windows that here was something for their pains, and those farthest west flattened their noses on the glass. From a window opposite, however, one pair of eyes was looking out on them with more than curiosity. The poor Professor could bear it no longer, and going to the door, called Margrédel by name. She would have beckoned him ; but he cried, "Come here, Margrédel," and retreated into the lobby, where he stood watching them.

"Is that your uncle?" said Willy.

"Yes. I must say good-bye." Then, still

with her hand in his, she continued, the Professor's brow growing darker—

"I know you mean no harm, Willy. But don't speak to Jean about—about Captain Hill in that way. It hurts."

She had not crossed the threshold when her uncle was at her side. She looked down at him in surprise. He was trembling, and cried in a shaky voice—

"Who is that? Is that young Oliphant?"

"Why, yes," she replied: "that's Willy."

He dared not speak the fear that held him.

"Do you know what they say in the town?" he said. "They say it's death to marry an Oliphant."

He noticed the smile on her face. It said that she had heard that story, and knew how the happy home in Eden Braes gave it the lie.

"I tell you they're cursed," he cried. "There's not a woman come near them but is scorched. There's not a woman had to do with them that's lived—and they live."

Have nothing to do with them. Oh, Margrédél, Margrédél, be warned !”

“Uncle,” she cried, and took his hands, and in one of hers still was Willy’s sugar-rock ; and she was half-ashamed, half-amused at the idea that was in his mind. But he put his arms around her, and, although it was dark in the passage, looked away from her eyes.

“Margrédél,” he said, holding her firm,—and for a second it seemed to her she was back in Jean’s arms in the hall at Eden Braes,—“Margrédél, your mother was such a girl as you are—young and fair and happy.” (They were trembling now, she with awe.) “We were alone in the world then, as we are now, Margrédél ; and I loved her as I love you, Margrédél. They balloted for the war, and I was taken. In my absence there came one—such a one as they say these Oliphants are, who break the hearts of women. He broke her heart. When I came back I found you.”

He suffered with every breath he drew

to tell that story. He felt the girl in his arms shrink with the shame, then struggle to be free ; and he was jealous of his sister's memory.

"She was your mother, Margrédel," he whispered ; and she fell sobbing on his shoulder.

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CHAPTER XVI.

AND now began the mighty roll of the season, which it is strange to think of as the oldest thing in the world, except, perhaps, the breaking of waves. There is this difference between these two—if they are to be set side by side at all—that the waves are darkest where they spring, and roll in lighter and greener, till they end in the little margin of white foam ; whereas it is the spring of the season that is fairest, and the fall is purple and sombre russet. Therein it is that the season speaks to the heart of a man.

This year the spring came early. The bud-tips made the bare boughs sparkle in the sunshine, and the hedges were bursting with greenery and song, long before men could

believe that winter was over. The cats found it so lazy on the garden-steps that they took no heed of the starlings on the green. Now and then, in the afternoons, a wasp could be found on the wall, half-dead for its venturesomeness ; and great bees startled one with their droning. People who kept to the streets in the winter began to wander down the wynds, at the foot of which the sea and the sand looked so sunny. Then wise men, who kept calendars, shook their heads, and said that we must suffer for this fine spring weather ; for fifty or forty years, ay, or even thirty, seem a great and long experience if they have been spent in measuring rainfalls or the price of winter wheat. But the birds and the bees and the young, who felt sure spring in their blood, were wiser than the grey men on their staves ; and from the last days of February the mighty procession marched forward without a check.

Those who tell this story would fain linger in the spring. The story was told often, up to not so many years ago, in the High Street

dining-room, with fingers going out to feel the groove where the carved letters had been, ere they were effaced. Those who tell the story, and those who listen, knowing the finish of it as well as the narrators, are loath to let the summer come; for in the summer Jean Oliphant died. Some said that she died of a broken heart, because of Captain Frank; and some, because she had to die as all her family's women-folk had. Even now, some old people are found who believe in the curse, and the facts are there; but most will have it that it was the broken heart. For myself, I think it may be that she died because of both. This, at any rate, I can tell: those—such as the doctor—who knew of neither of these causes failed to supply any other. “She slipped through their fingers like a knotless threed,” Rab said; and none could say more.

During these months Margrédél's mind had been full of her own sorrow. It was not without its discipline; and she was a deeper, less protesting Margrédél than when she only

grieved in sympathy with Jean. Hearing always, when word did come from Eden Braes, of Jean's great quiet, she thought she could understand it, not guessing, any more than others, what the end was to be. Only, as was natural, she judged from her experience that all the sorrow of life shaped itself in man's wrong to woman; and therein she erred greatly.

Meanwhile, it was a comfort to the Professor to know that her thoughts were where his were. After a fashion, of course; for he had not told her all. She never referred to her father. He said to himself that he could not speak of the last discovery until he was sure of it. In reality he feared that her influence would be against all that it was in his blood to do, should the discovery be verified.

One thing was made easier by his telling her even so little: his breaking to her his intention of going to France without her. She begged to be taken; and he had but to say, "I am running across on business only; it is con-

cerning your mother's affairs I go ; " and she acquiesced.

Now he had been gone just two weeks to a day, taking advantage of a vessel which had run into the harbour for a load to Dunkirk, when Margrédél was summoned to Eden Braes. All the time of her journey thither, she thought of what she should say to comfort and console Jean, and of how she should wean her back to something of her old gaiety. She did not know that Douglas Oliphant's sending for her meant that at length he saw that his Jean was dying. Was that likely to make the thought of Margrédél sweeter to him? Jean was the apple of his eye,—the one spot which selfishness had never hardened. Bitter as it was to hear her ask for Margrédél, he sent for her, as he would have done anything to please her. So Margrédél came, to find Jean far beyond her care ; but to make her happier—it seemed—by coming. She smiled a sweet recognition as Margrédél bent over her to kiss her ; and then she turned to her father and mother and brother again.

I think that it is not decent to speak of such a grief and loss as theirs. I know, too, that their affliction is as old as Time, and that there can be few who have not experienced it beyond all speaking. Therefore I will tell of such things only as cannot be passed over.

One of these, by reason of its drawing him nearer to his wife, was the pain it caused Douglas to watch her, compelled to sit by inactive, save for checking her tears, while Margrédel smoothed Jean's pillow. It was a sad mind he was in. I suppose a mother could not have come to feel so towards her offspring; but Douglas was beginning, from his love for Jean, to abhor the sight of Margrédel, although she too was his child.

Another thing was, that Jean often mentioned her Uncle Wull's name; and her eyes, if not her lips, said, that now that Margrédel was there, if Uncle Wull came the family would be complete; and only Douglas knew how true her feeling was. Although Wull, who was in England, posted home with all

speed, he was too late. He arrived on the evening after Jean's death, and Douglas led him straight to his wife's room. What they found was Mrs. Oliphant very quiet and wonderfully comforted ; and at her feet (in Jean's place, as Douglas thought) sat Margrédél, looking in the waning light the very picture of his daughter who lay dead upstairs. The sight of Wull sent the two women into tears. But Douglas flung out of the room and out of the house, and down the burnside. In the grey twilight, silence lay over the river, broken only by the swish of the fishing-casts, or by a ploughman whistling himself homewards. Douglas strode on, grief and anger raging within him ; and the anglers bent over their rods when they saw who it was, for they knew that he had been bereaved of his daughter. He entered the den at the old mill. As he passed the path to Kemback, a cold chill slid into his heart with the image of the dead being lowered into the grave. Nearer the toll a hedgehog caught his foot. He kicked it from

him ; but it fell in his path again, and he could see its quills bristling against danger. It settled his mood for a time. He stayed over it a second ; then with a mighty kick sent it crashing among the trees.

“Come what like, I’m ready for ’t,” he said, straightening himself up in the darkness, the happier for being resolved, although the resolve was bitter.

And in this defiant mood he remained until the funeral. But after the funeral, when they were leaving the kirkyard by the wooden gate, and were on the descending path, Wull Oliphant already on it, and Douglas and his son following, all the boy’s grief welled up within him. He turned to look behind.

“O father,” he cried, taking Dug’s arm, “must we leave her here?”

It was then, for the first time, that Douglas wept for Jean. There was something heart-rending in the boy’s cry. It made Douglas realise his loss vividly : that they were going home to Eden Braes without Jean for ever.

And Margrédel still in the house.

He opened the door of his wife's room. The blinds were drawn, and in the darkness the two women still sat close together. Anguish wrung his heart, and Margrédel could see its marks upon his face as he turned and went out. She stole from the room and came upon him in the hall, leaning against the wall. She put a hand upon his shoulder, and said gently, "Your wife is alone." It was a voice telling him what he should do. It was Margrédel's voice; he could not look her in the face, but turned from her and crossed the hall.

Mrs. Oliphant dried her eyes when she heard her husband's step. Long years ago her pride had taught her to do that; now habit.

"O Jean, Jean!" he cried.

"My poor Dug!" She put her hand on the shoulder that was bent at her knee.

"Stop, Jean. Listen to what I have to tell. God forgive me. You forgive me if you can. It should have been told before."

But she interrupted him.

"I know it, Dug. I've heard it long ago. It's that old story of your family's curse. Would you believe 't? Would ye forgive God if it were true? I would n't. I don't believe it. Unto the third and fourth generation—it's a lie, Dug. We suffer in our ain day and generation—for our ain sins—for the sins o' those about us. As sure as there's a God above, Dug, he'll suffer for 't that deceived our Jean." She was sobbing as if her heart would break. "Margrédel has told me. He deceived her. He tell 't Margrédel the same."

There was a violent throb in Dug's frame at her knee, as she went on—

"There's nineteen break their word, Dug; but the twentieth breaks a heart. Margrédel told me more when she was at it. Worse than fatherless—she is—with a father that never knew her—that killed her mother. Will such escape? God will smite them in their homes. He will rob them of the treasure of their hearts. He will pluck the apple of their eye."

"O Jean, stop!" Dug cried. "He has done so. I have sinned, and it's this I should have told you. Was she that's gone not my treasure, the apple of my eye? Can you forgive me, Jean?"

Mrs. Oliphant was bewildered.

"I forgive you—anything. Need you ask? Am I not your wife?"

But he mistook the import of her words.

"Yes, yes. My wife. You need n't fear that. Not that."

"What is it, Dug?" and she would have drawn him closer to her. But he shrank from her.

"Can you not see? Must I tell you? I am smitten as you say I should be smitten. God has said one daughter of mine should bring bitterness to my lips at the grave of another."

Her eyes were opened.

"And Margrédel is——"

"Yes," said Douglas.

"Can you forgive me, Jean?" he cried; for she had not spoken.

"Dug, my dear," was her answer through her sobs, "I forgive you. It's another should forgive."

"Has He not robbed me of half my life?" he cried. "Can He forgive freely that deals such retribution?"

But "Hush," she said, and stilled him. "May He forgive me. I, too, forgot Him. It was of"—she shut her eyes, and her breath came as with one in pain—"it was of—her—that I was thinking."

Her words sank upon his soul like a hot iron. Yet even then his jealous temper overmastered him. For when, by-and-by, Jean put her hand upon his arm again and said, not daring to look up, "Does Margrédel know——?"

"She must not, she shall not," he cried. "Why is she here? and, Jean?—O! my poor dead Jean," he moaned; and in the fulness of his grief he forgot Margrédel.

But for all her tears his wife did not; and her voice was low in his ear again.

“ Will you not tell Margrédel ? ”

Just then Willy's step sounded in the hall ; they could hear him go out. Into Dug's mind came again the boy's piteous cry, and with it the remembrance that Jean was lying alone in the darkness. Dug knew whither Willy's steps were bound, and rose to go with him ; as he rose, an answer formed itself upon his lips—

“ Willy must know, then ? ”

She struggled with herself.

“ It 's for Willy's sake you 'll not tell her,” she said, as he left her.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON this same night, the night of Jean's funeral, the Professor disembarked from the coach at Cupar.

The weeks since he sailed out of Kirkcaldy harbour had been to him like a dream. Sometimes one, sometimes another of its events swept through his mind: his journey to his native village; the searching of books in the hospital of the neighbouring town, which told that Douglas had lain there when the other Margrédel had nursed in it; the old woman plying her knitting-needles within a stone-throw of his sister's grave, and recalling for him the handsome bearing, the swarthy face, the light-coloured locks of his sister's English sweetheart, so vividly that once more he was

looking down from the dark High Street windows with the younger Margrédél at his side pointing out to him, as she had done, Douglas Oliphant riding past. The passion for vengeance had taken hold of him, casting out every thought and memory, and howling aloud within him like the evil spirit in a waste place.

A woman had looked over her window in answer to his loud knocks on the High Street door. Margrédél had gone to Eden Braes, she told him. The young mistress there was dead—had he not heard?—and the hearse had come out of Edinburgh that morning that was to carry her to Kemback. He had not heard. He scarce heard yet. What was the death of Jean compared with this, that the traitor was found, tracked home, and that Margrédél was with him? He caught the same coach that had set him down, and was rumbled away to Cupar, his eyes blind to his neighbours or the beauty of the road, but turned in upon himself, where the Devil held high carnival.

When he landed on Cupar causeway, they told him Eden Braes lay eastwards on the river, and pointed down the Bobber Wynd as the nearest road to it.

In the gloaming the broken sky-line of the houses was blue and dim. The hum of a summer's day still lingered between the walls. At the bottom of the Bobber Wynd two youths stood speaking to two women on a doorstep—the elder with her arms akimbo, the younger with a stocking in her busy fingers, and her soft eyes going between the woman and the men.

“It was a lairge funeral, my man tell 't me.”

Jack Elder nodded.

“I saw'd come in aboot,” the elder woman went on. “You'll be gaun to watch in Kem-back the nicht, verra like?”

Jack turned to his companion.

“So we are, and I'm sorry for any resurrectionist gentry we get in our fing'rs.”

“Are ye to watch ilka nicht?” said the girl.

“Twa and twa. Some three score o's.”

It was not every day that the young lads

around banded for such a holy purpose, and the women with wet eyes watched these two go down the wynd.

The Professor tapped the girl on the shoulder.

"Will you direct me to Eden Braes?" he said.

"This is a bad business," said her companion, drying her eyes with her apron, as if consolation was to be found in a fresh gossip upon it. "Maybe you're some friends to the fowk at Eden Braes?"

The girl drew closer in sympathy.

"Will you direct me?" the Professor said, turning impatiently to her. But a thought struck the elder woman. The Professor wore a black coat. So, they said, did doctors and such as harried newly-made graves.

She gave the girl a look from under bent brows.

"D'ye see yon twa?" she said, pointing to the retreating youths. "Follow yon twa. They're gaun your gate, yont by Eden Braes."

The Professor went down the street.

"What can he want at the Hoose at this time o' nicht?" said the girl.

"No good, I'se warrant," the other replied. "Leastways I never seed him 'tween the e'en afore;" and that was conclusive.

The two lads sauntered along the river-bank to Kemback, talking of many things besides of Jean and their night's mission, although their thoughts would come back to it. The Professor kept in their wake, just sighting them where the river runs through the meadow-land, and creeping closer where they might be lost in the gloom of the woods.

Some two miles down he came opposite a house in which he thought he recognised Margrédel's oft-described Eden Braes. The two lads passed it by, and he stopped and hesitated. For the first time he asked himself what he was there for—what he meant to do. At that moment a figure approached him out of the gloaming, and with the thought that it might be Douglas Oliphant, his purpose rose clear in his mind and flashed itself to his finger-tips.

But it was only Rab Hetherwick who approached ; and he used to tell how the Professor slipped out upon him from behind a tree like a weasel, with his cold eyes looking up at his face, and then blinking like any beast when you stare at it. It was after the events of the night that Rab told that ; but it is not for me to impeach the wisdom which comes from after-knowledge. And indeed Rab, when in specially honest mood, would add—

“ I thought he was blinkin', like me, for grief. It's queer how ye'll be deceived. There was a man cam' and sat afore me in the kirk aince, an' kept noddin' his head. I cam' to learn he wis sleepin' ; but for a while I thocht it was piety.”

“ Mounseer Malbert ! ” Rab stammered out when he saw who it was. “ I didna ken you wis here, though your—Mamsillie Margrédél was. You werena at the puir lassie's funeral ? ”

“ No,” said the Professor, to all appearance quite composed. “ I am just off the coach at

Cupar. Is that the house, over there, where Margrédél is staying? "

" Ay: that's Eden Braes, if you're goin' there. Though I canna think it'll ever be the same place wi' Miss Jean lyin' cauld in Kemback kirkyaird. I met the maister, an' the young maister wi' 'm, back a bit. Awa' to her grave-side, I reckon."

" Mr. Oliphant? " said the Professor.

" Ay."

" Down the path? "

" What's your hurry? " said Rab; for Monsieur Malbert would have pushed past him.

" Nothing: only, I wish to see Mr. Oliphant. Let me past, and I'll overtake him."

" I'll gang back wi' you, and show you the way. He'll be at Kemback by this time, and you would miss the road," Rab said. " The puir body'll come by some hurt," he added to himself.

The Professor was eager on his heels; but Rab walked stolidly, for he had nothing to hurry him, and he had a great deal to say.

“I’ve buried folk, young and auld, for thirty year and mair; but I dinna mind a buir’el where I had to fecht to keep my e’en clear for my wark. It’s a kind o’ infectious, greetin’ is, among women; and when they begin, ye a sort o’ harden yersel’ by instinct. Men maun be lop-sided at the other side from women, jist to haud the world goin’ straight. But it’s a kind o’ awsome thing to hear the men round a grave snifterin’.”

Then he went on. “The young lads want to watch her grave. I met twa o’ them doon the burn the noo. Marg’et—that’s my wife—Marg’et says there’ll be need for them, for there’s sure something to happen from using a hearse; but they’re illogical cattle, women are.”

The mention of Marg’et’s name recalled her loud condemnation of Margrédél as the cause of Jean’s death. It is a strange thing, that howsoever sensible a man is, he always takes his wife’s side in a story. I have often wondered whether he really believes it, or only acts

as if he does : it is certain that, whichever it is, it has to account for a great many of the misunderstandings in this world. Rab could plead an excuse which, perhaps, could be set forth in behalf of many men : it was that his wife so “ deaved ” him, as he said, with her story, that he was not safe in going against it ; and when a man acquiesces in an untruth, he generally ends with believing it. So Rab itched to learn how much Margrédel’s uncle knew in the matter of Jean’s death.

“ Ye ken what they say she died o’ ? ” he asked.

He had to repeat his question.

“ No,” said the other.

“ She died because her sweetheart jilted her—left her for another. That’s to say, we connect wi’ the house, say that. It must ha’ been difficult to find ane to prefer afore her,” he added insinuatingly.

I have come to a point in my story when I could well wish that you heard it, as I did, from Rab’s own lips ; for he always told it as

if he were living over again the short walk in the dark woods with the Professor. From this I know that the Professor's words made a marvellous impression upon him, and some of Rab's intensity seemed to pass into his hearers.

At any rate, Rab had no sooner said this than what does the Professor do but give a kind of cry and clutch Rab's shoulder.

"Does he know what put her in her grave?" he asked.

"Who?"

"Her father—Douglas Oliphant."

"I 'se warrant."

The Professor hugged Rab closer; but he need not have done so. His eye would have held him fast.

"How does he take it?" he said.

"Just gang and see him," Rab replied, with a world of meaning in the words.

They have come to Kemback brae, and the footpath started from where they stood.

"You'll find him at her grave-side, doubt-

less ; ” and it was perhaps a fine feeling bred of pity that prevented Rab from going farther with his companion, and so intruding upon the laird’s sorrow.

“ Mind and keep to the path ; tak’ care o’ the rocks,” he said, and bade the Professor good night.

Down the road he met Margrédel and Wull Oliphant. Not knowing that Dug and Willy had gone thither, she had begged Wull to walk with her to Kemback.

Rab stopped and touched his cap.

“ I ’ve just left your uncle at the kirk-path, miss,” he said.

“ My uncle ! ” said Margrédel, starting.

“ My uncle ’s—my uncle ’s in France.”

“ No, miss. He came aff the coach the nicht. I fand him at the riverside opposite Eden Braes ; and when I tell ’t him Maister Oliphant was awa’ to Kemback, he would ha’e after him.”

“ Thank you, Rab. Good night. Let us go forward,” said Wull.

Meanwhile the Professor was picking his steps towards the kirk, which stood out, dim and grey, against the woods. The air was full of the scents of the vegetation upon which the dew had fallen; but no sound broke its stillness. The two lads in the kirk, hearing footsteps on the turf, had come out; but, recognising Douglas and Willy, they went back again and watched them through the open door.

By-and-by father and son went out at the south gate, and walked in single file along the path that skirted the rocky precipice overhanging the den road. A figure stood in their way.

Sorrow must have written its lines on Douglas's features; but the Professor's face glowed with recognition. To the one person in all the world to whom Dug ever spoke of these events—and you can guess that that was his wife—he said—

“His face wore the exultant look I've

seen on one another's faces when we laddies breasted the waves on Kirkcaldy sands."

"Sir," said Douglas, "you are Professor Malbert, are you not, out of Kirkcaldy—the uncle of Margrédel?" He held out his hand—very gravely and courteously, you may be sure.

"The brother of Margrédel," the other replied, looking straight into his face.

Dug started. His boy was crowding up the path behind him.

"This is my laddie," he said, with an appeal in his eyes and voice.

"It was the father I came to seek," the other replied.

"And you've found him," Dug said, some of the agony of his thoughts finding expression. "You have come for Margrédel, have you not? You will return with us to Eden Braes."

"Margrédel with you!" the Professor cried, as if he had not known it before.

All the repression had gone from his voice.

Wull and his companion had reached the end of the path ; and now Margrédel, catching his arm, said—

“That’s my uncle’s voice. Listen !” and they stood and listened.

“Margrédel with you ! It’s meet, and she knows it not,” her uncle went on. “My feet are dirty with the earth of her mother’s grave, and you would have them cross your threshold. I thank God—if there is a God above these stars—they were never tempted across it before I knew you.”

The boy had leapt up on the low grass bank on the inside of the path, and looked at the Professor wonderingly.

“Not a word more,” cried Dug, his old spirit asserting itself: “my laddie and I go to Eden Braes. If you want me there, you’ll find me. In the meantime, let me pass.”

He would have walked on ; but the Professor held his ground.

“ Let you pass ! ” he cried, and fury seemed to burst from every pore. “ It’s years I let you pass, not deeming you other than honest. For months I have watched you, praying God to keep my fingers off you till I found you out. I’ve tracked you here, and, by God, I’ll not let you pass until——”

Douglas sprang back a step. With a wild cry Margrédel rushed from Wull’s side.

But, with a young heart and set teeth, the boy had met the Professor’s spring. His wild impetus carried them to the edge of the rocks. The Professor was a frail old man at the best, and he fell backwards, clutching his assailant.

It was all the work of an instant.

“ The rocks ! Mind the rocks ! ” the boy’s voice sounded up the short slope that led to the precipice. There was a crash as their bodies bounded off the tree-trunks ; then all was still.

For a second or two Margrédel and Douglas stood, side by side, on the brink of the wood ; then Wull, running up, caught her as she fell.

“Take her,” he said to Dug: “she’s yours.” He looked over the precipice. “Heaven help her ! Who else has she ?”

He did not mean to be cruel. The truth which he had learned a few minutes ago from the Professor’s lips had grown as old as his catechism.

Already he was on the path to the foot of the rocks. He could hear the swish of the grain and laboured breath as the two watchers made straight through the barley-field towards the sound of Margrédel’s cry. Wull scrambled back again.

“Mind, Dug, they just fell,” he said.

Dug was not listening. To Wull, low on the slope, it seemed he towered above him like a rock, his legs apart, and seeming to grip the earth. His hat had fallen from his head, and his fair hair lay round his dark face, on which his eyes shone like lights at sea. He held the

girl in his arms, and he held her tight ; and Wull could see him raise her up and down, till he held her high above his head, as he might have done a fox to cast it to the dogs. It was done calmly, deliberately, without effort ; and Wull knew that it was murder. Margrédel hung in Dug's arms for a second, and in that second Wull, measuring his height with his brother, had a hold of her, and looking into his eyes, said—

“ Dug, boy ! ”

Margrédel fell from his brother's arms into his, so that he staggered under the burden.

“ My Jean ! my Jean ! ” cried Dug, and stumbled across the dark field.

Wull left Margrédel in charge of the two lads, who had come up ; and, bidding them remain and watch, he ran down the path, and round to the foot of the rocks. Disfigured, mutilated, clasped together in their dreadful death, the Professor and Willy lay in the road ; and Wull separated them, lest any, coming up, should guess the truth.

That is the story of the Oliphants of the High Street house. Perhaps you think that there should be more to tell. It may be that some of you have heard more ; for I am aware that there are many people who profess to know, for example, what Douglas said to Margrédel. No one knows what passed between the two—not even Mrs. Oliphant. These same people have told me that Mrs. Oliphant's hair turned white when they brought home her boy to Eden Braes. I could have told them how it had greyed through long years before that ; but I did not care to correct them, lest, on that account, they might think that her grief was less. If I have led you to any knowledge of a woman than whom I never knew a nobler, you do not need to be told that even in that great sorrow it was Dug she thought of. It is beyond my understanding how any one can conjecture what fell out between the survivors of that tragedy. I cannot. I do not wish to. I do know, however, that when Margrédel said that France was her

home, and that it was in her native village that she ought to spend her days, Jean acquiesced readily, and was glad that in some measure the tongues of the country-side would be kept from wagging against her husband. If you are inclined to respect her less because of this, let me tell you also that she bore Willy's death meekly, charging it against herself because, for his sake, she had held her tongue, and would have wronged Margrédel, if she could, by leaving her in ignorance.

Years ago she and her husband were taken far beyond the wagging of tongues. To-day I climbed the hill-path at Kemback, and stood beside the ripening grain upon the plateau, within cry of where they were laid. On some such afternoon they buried the younger Jean. I could mark with my eye the line which the watchers must have taken through the barley-field to the rocks which echoed Willy's cry. The ivy kirk is a ruin, and a newer building stands farther up the hill. Near by it they have planted a school, set against a blaze of scarlet

rowans ; and through its open windows, as I stood beneath them, came the hum of lessons, mixing with the voices of the birds as they called to one another in the woods. As I walked round by the Hetherwicks'—whence a blue coil still issued, but not from the hearth of Rab and Marg'et—and down the hill-path to the saw-mill, and along the river to Eden Braes, where a stranger door is shut upon me, the click-click of the reapers in the fields around seemed to say, eloquently, that to-day is everything, and that the dead are soon forgotten.

I do not think that that is a very wise reflection. There are no Oliphants now in the old town by the Firth. When we buried Wull, we buried the last of that family. Yet it seems to me that its memory is fragrant still. Down by the harbour, even now, you will hear Wull's name often ; and that is something.

“And Margrédel?” perhaps you say. I am coming to that. At Wull's death I went over his papers. It was by his own instructions that I did so. Among piles of bills of lading,

of lists of ships, and all the remnants of the man's activity, I came across some of the letters that passed in later years between Margrédel and Mrs. Oliphant. I may not divulge their contents even if I would ; I can only say that if a man were not humbled in presence of the spirit that they breathed, he is not worthy to know the love of women. Besides these, there were many other letters. When I fell upon a rough draft of that one which Beatrix never opened, I could not but laugh—laugh to think of Wull, and all men, and of the *Polite Letter-Writer* on the shelf close by, with the page turned down on the model it so slavishly copied. There were letters from Margrédel to Wull, and they reflected some of the joys of her later days as well as the sorrows of the earlier ; and one of her greatest joys, clearly, was Wull's annual visit to her. Beneath all these were two, clasped together with an elastic band which broke to my touch, so rotted was it ; and one had the seal unbroken. I opened it, and found that it was a letter of his own to Margrédel, re-

turned to him from France. With it came the other note, which told how she had caught a fever and died. It was dated a few days before my fourteenth birthday ; and that was the news, I doubt not, which made Wull so testy on that night when my curiosity was whetted for the story of Margrédel.

“ Where is the moral of that story ? ” some one may say. There are many morals to your choosing. One is that all the misery in it followed wrong-doing : an old-fashioned moral, but perhaps none the less wise on that account. Or you may find one, where I seemed to find it this afternoon at Kemback—in the hollowness of all things. Or it may be that if you know this town by the Firth to-day, with its new industries, new ways, new hopes, to compare it with the home of Dug Oliphant, you may realise once more, as Wull realised it, that the world wags on. That is the greatest of all morals.

And if, as may well be, you care for no moral, it is as I should wish it, inasmuch as

the story was not told to point one, but because it is the story of people whose memory is dear to me, and of a country-side that I love.

THE END.

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